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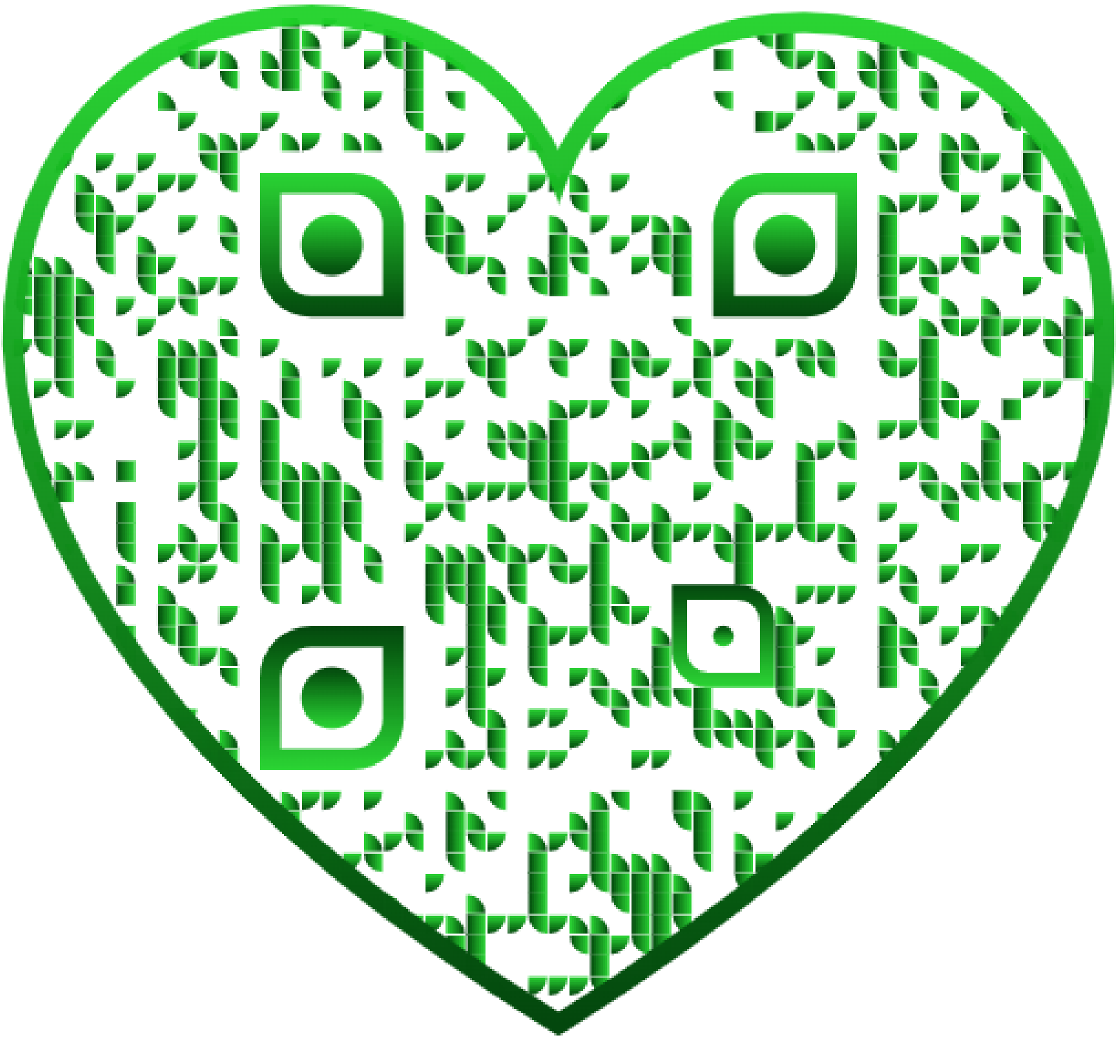

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GUITARS

The Winter Limited Edition

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THE ROOT NOTE

It's not often that I get nervous before an interview. However, ahead of speaking to Joan Baez for this issue, I must confess to being a little… well… jittery. She is, quite undeniably, a superstar. For nearly six decades, generation after generation has fallen in love with her music. Baez has rubbed shoulders with everybody worth rubbing shoulders with. So many questions, so little time!

On top of all that, Baez says her new album is almost certainly her last and the accompanying tour will definitely be her last. A historic moment, then. Find out why she's calling it quits in our extended feature, which took some serious pestering to get. And, in case you were wondering, Baez was lovely. Phew!

Super-talented Swedish folk duo, First Aid Kit, grace our main cover slot this issue. Now, these sisters are *everywhere* at the moment and the new album has been picking up great reviews from across the spectrum. I instantly fell in love with 'My Silver Lining' when it came on the radio while driving down the motorway in 2014 and saw them for the first time at Glastonbury last summer. It's a pleasure to have them in the mag.

Also, to our great delight, we've had pretty much every Gibson Montana 2018 acoustic with us this month. I could attempt nonchalance and tell you to read on and see if they cut the mustard. But, let's be honest, they did. Obviously. You know they did. We loved 'em! We also got our fingers around a Faith specifically for percussive playing, which we reckon is a banger whether you're tapping, tickling, strumming, or picking.

We've got plenty more great interviews too, including Darlingside, I'm With Her, Sarah McQuaid, Alela Dianne, and Will Varley. Our vintage guitar expert Paul Brett takes us deep inside his incredible personal collection once again. There's hot new music, a bit of history, top tuition and a heck load more in this awesome issue. One lucky reader can also win a Fender Travel guitar.

Enjoy the issue!

Dan Hobson
Editor

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Contents

ISSUE 141 MARCH 2018

Interviews

FIRST AID KIT **38**
George King catches up with the chartbreaking Swedes on the release of new album, *Ruins*

JOAN BAEZ **14**
Is this summer's tour going to be the folk singer's last? Dan Hobson had the honour of a chat with a bona fide icon

DARLINGSIDE **20**

ALELA DIANE **24**

I'M WITH HER **28**

SARAH MCQUAID **32**

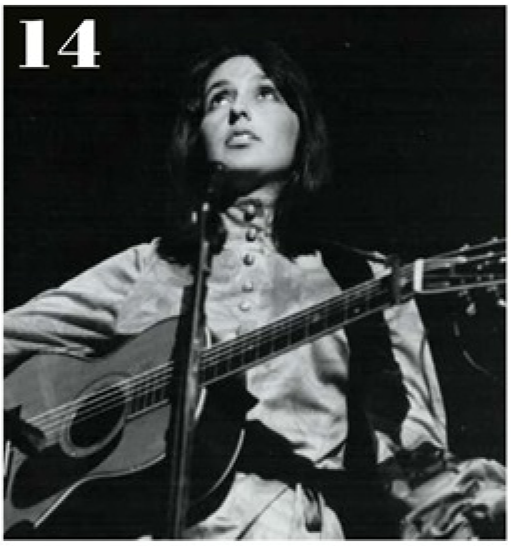
WILL VARLEY **34**

24

28

38

32

14


20

34

worldmags.net

74

78

Features

NEWS 8

THE MUSICIAN'S UNION 12

COMPETITION 13
Win a Fender Classic Design Travel Guitar

IN THE WORKSHOP: PEPE ROMERO 74

NICK BENJAMIN: PICKUPS EXPLORED 76

NEW MUSIC: RETUNE YOUR EARS 78

NEW MUSIC: CD REVIEWS 80

VINTAGE GUITARS WITH PAUL BRETT 46

LEGENDS: JAMES TAYLOR 98

Gear

On the market for new kit? Every month our team of expert reviewers run the rule over the latest models

GIBSON MONTANA J-45 STANDARD & GIBSON MONTANA 50

GIBSON HUMMINGBIRD VINTAGE CHERRY SUNBURST 54

GIBSON MONTANA SJ 200 STANDARD 58

GIBSON PARLOR AG 62

FAITH VENUS HIGLOSS VENUS CUT/ELECTRO PERCUSSIVE.. 66

94

Techniques

Bitesize nuggets of ukulele, mandolin, banjo, classical, slide or just regular acoustic guitar wisdom from our team of world-class players

CHRIS EATON 86

THOMAS LEEB 88

DANIEL HO 90

CLIVE CARROLL 92

LEON HUNT 94

CHRIS WOODS 96

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ACOUSTIC NEWS DESK

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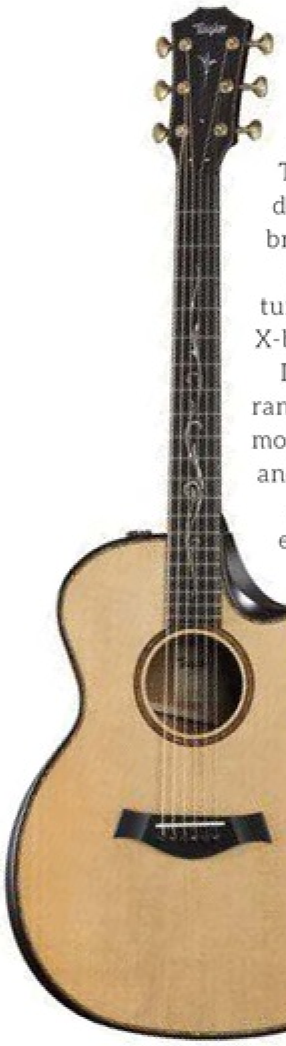
NAMM SPECIAL

MORE THAN JUST A TRADE EVENT, THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MUSIC MERCHANTS' ANNUAL GATHERING IN ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA, IS A CHANCE FOR THE GREAT AND THE GOOD OF THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT WORLD TO SHOW OFF THEIR LATEST WARES – AND THIS YEAR HAS SEEN RICH PICKINGS ON THE ACOUSTIC FRONT. READ MORE HERE…



TAYLOR FLIPS THE V AT X-BRACING

Taylor Guitars has announced a "fundamental innovation" in the design of acoustic guitars, with the introduction of its V-Class bracing system.

The firm says the new V-shaped internal bracing offers greater tuning stability, volume and sustain than its more traditional X-braced models.

Developed by the brand's master luthier Andy Powers, the range will launch with an offering of four Grand Auditorium models, three standards (including the PS14ce, K24ce and 914ce) and the Builder's Edition K14ce.

According to Taylor, the V-Class bracing was conceived in an effort to control the top movement of the guitar and tackle the intonation issues inherent to equal temperament tuning using the guitar's construction, as opposed to saddle or fret adjustment. The resulting design is purported to be easier to tune, with purer and more consistent harmonics and pitch across the neck.

In a sign that Powers' star continues to rise at Taylor, the V-Class will be the first Taylor model to feature Andy's signature alongside the usual Bob Taylor mark. The debut range is limited to just the Grand Auditorium designs initially, but we suspect we'll see a wider variety exiting the workshop soon, not least because of a photo , in which Powers appears to be a working on a V-braced Grand Concert top.

Info: www.taylorguitars.com

FISHMAN'S NEW LOUDBOX MINI CHARGE

Acoustic pickup, preamp and amp specialist Fishman has announced the immediate release of the Loudbox Mini Charge battery-powered acoustic instrument amplifier.

The Loudbox Mini Charge has dedicated Instrument and Mic channels with Input Gain controls, alongside Bluetooth wireless capability. Fishman claims the rechargeable battery has a life of 12 hours "at average volume", while the amp also boasts inbuilt digital reverb and chorus.

We rate Fishman's already-convenient mains-powered Loudbox Mini, so have high hopes for the Charge.

Info: www.fishman.com

FENDER'S CALIFORNIA SERIES ACOUSTICS

Fender has unveiled a colourful new range of sun-kissed acoustics, dubbed the California Series.

The instruments feature solid spruce tops and mahogany back and sides, and will be available in a range of bold colours, like the Aqua Splash pictured here, and in diverse shapes.

The Series is split into three sub-ranges: the entry-level California Player, the California Special, which upgrades to a Sitka spruce top, solid mahogany back/sides and bone nut/saddle and the California Classic, which feature natural mahogany back and sides.

Info: www.fender.com

MARTIN: BIGGEST FLAGSHIP UPDATE SINCE 1833

Martin has reimagined its entire Standard Series for 2018, resulting in 21 updated acoustics. Martin is even calling it "the most significant update to the company's flagship line of guitars in its 185-year history".

High-end models such as the D-45 and 000-28 receive changes including a thinner, more comfortable high-performance neck, plus vintage appointments, including aging toner and open-gear tuners.

Internal tweaks include scalloped and forward-shifted top bracing, dependent on body style. The announcement follows last week's news of Martin's new $15k John Mayer D-45.

Info: www.martinguitar.com/standard

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GET DELAY, DISTORTION AND REVERB EFFECTS DIRECT FROM YOUR ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Acoustic innovation seems to be in the air this year, and newcomer Tonik Sound has served up an intriguing new offering with the Pulse.

The nifty bit of kit gives players delay, distortion and reverb effects straight from an acoustic – no modification, cables, pedals or amps required.

Attaching to an acoustic guitar via an elastic loop around the strap button, the Pulse modifies vibrations within the body of the guitar to produce effects.

The accessory is designed with ease-of-use in mind, featuring four effects

> ***It gives players delay, distortion and reverb effects straight from an acoustic with no modification***

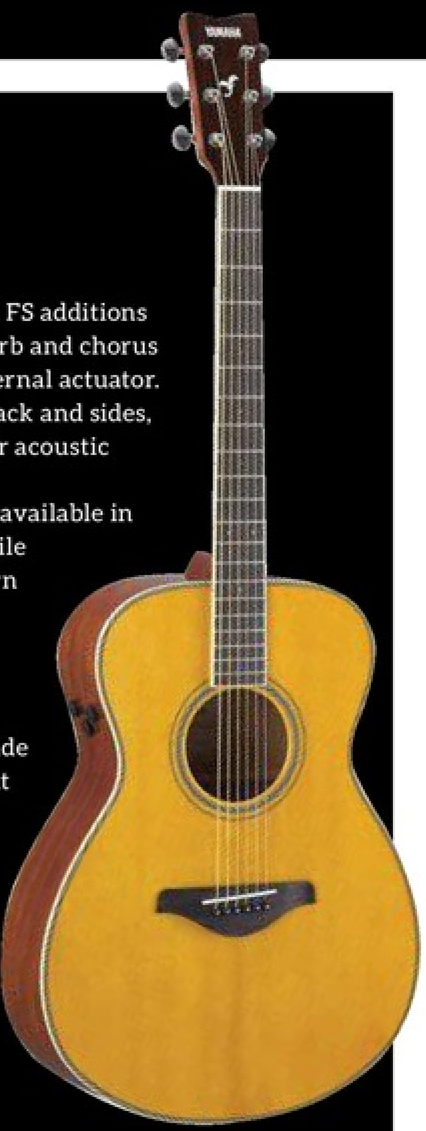
sliders for delay time, delay feedback, distortion and reverb, which are triggered via a palm switch that can be quickly accessed while playing. An indicator LED shows when effects are active.

Tonik Sound launches a crowdfunding campaign for Pulse on March 12.

Info: http://toniksound.com

Other acoustic innovations announced at the show include HyVibe Audio's Smart Acoustic Guitar, which features a built-in speaker, multi-FX, recorder and amp; plus the OneManBand, which generates a backing band based on your playing and makes your guitar sound like any instrument.

YAMAHA: MORE AFFORDABLE TRANSACOUSTICS



Yamaha has announced new, more affordable FG and FS additions to its TransAcoustic range, which boasts built-in reverb and chorus effects that can be heard unplugged, thanks to an internal actuator.

Both models feature solid spruce tops, mahogany back and sides, and new scalloped bracing, promising a "louder, richer acoustic sound".

The FG-TA offers a traditional western body and is available in Vintage Tint, Brown Sunburst and Black finishes, while the FS-TA packs a concert body in Vintage Tint, Brown Sunburst and Red.

If you're interested in how the effects work, an actuator is fitted inside each guitar, and vibrates in response to string vibrations – these vibrations are then carried by the body of the guitar and the air inside and out, generating reverb and chorus sounds without the need for external effects.

Side-mounted knobs adjust the intensity of the effect and line-out volume level, as well as providing on/off control.

These guitars follow the LS-TA and LL-TA, which were released back in 2016.

Yamaha's latest TransAcoustic models will set you back $939 apiece, considerably less than its predecessors' $1,600.

Info: usa.yamaha.com

PRS REVEALS STUNNING SE ACOUSTICS

Paul Reed Smith and his team have announced the new range of PRS SE acoustic guitars.

The PRS SE Angelus Cutaway and PRS SE Tonare Grand – meaning "Angel" and "Thunder" respectively – feature an array of innovative features, some lush tonewoods and a choice of either traditional X-bracing or PRS's hybrid X/Classical bracing.

In addition, the unique combination tonewoods such as mahogany, ovangkol and maple as well as bone nuts and saddles all add to the beautiful resonance and playability of the guitars. Each guitar comes fitted with a Fishman pickup and every model also comes with a hard case.

Info: www.prsguitars.com

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HARMONIC HENDRIX HOME GUITARS BUILT FROM WOOD SALVAGED FROM JIMI'S CHILDHOOD HOME

In collaboration with Authentic Hendrix, Canada's JOI Guitars has announced it will be crafting a set of 10 acoustic guitars built out of wood reclaimed from Jimi's childhood home, the first of which was revealed at NAMM.

> **"Each guitar contains an actual piece of Jimi's legacy"**

Woods from the bedroom and living room of the Hendrix family's Seattle home has been used, including African blackwood back and sides, while the neck is composed of floorboards.

Just about every aspect of the Hendrix home that can be used has been employed here, including side fret markers made out of wiring encased in silver, while the fret markers started life as floorboard nails, and the soundhole rosette is constructed from paint chips scraped from floorboards.

Elsewhere, Hendrix's logo appears at the 12th fret, and the Authentic Hendrix logo crops up on the rear of the headstock, which also appears to play host to Graph Tech Ratio tuners.

Suffice to say, it's an exhaustively constructed instrument.

"Jimi's guitar was an extension of himself ... a part of who he was," says Janie Hendrix, president and CEO of Authentic Hendrix.

"What makes this JOI Hendrix Home Guitar so special and meaningful is that each limited-edition guitar contains an actual piece of Jimi's legacy and family heritage, the place he called home. So, in a sense, it's a part of Jimi. And we are deeply moved by the entire concept."

Part of the proceeds from sales of the guitars will go to the Jimi Hendrix Park Foundation.

Presales of Harmonic Hendrix Home Guitars are now being accepted.

Info: www.joiguitars.com

ERA 2 TOPS OUT HUGHES & KETTNER'S PREMIUM ACOUSTIC AMP RANGE

Hughes & Kettner has announced the release of its second 'era' model, doubling the size of its nascent premium acoustic amp range.

era 2 has the same feature set as the earlier era 1, but is larger and pumps out up to 400W, compared to its predecessor's 250.

Developed in collaboration with renowned acoustic amplifier designer Michael Eisenmann, the era 2 is said to be particularly suited to percussive playing styles, use with external devices like drum machines, or for instruments with lower-frequency ranges like double basses and bass guitars, thanks to its boosted low-end output, delivered by two 8" speakers, augmented with a single 1" tweeter dome.

There's an EQ deployed alongside 16 built-in effects, including various reverbs, delays, a chorus, a flanger, and combos of the various types, many of which can be adjusted, customised and saved as presets at will.

On the rear panel, era 2 features outputs suitable for any conceivable professional purpose, including a DI output, a stereo Line Out, and an S/PDIF-Toslink optical out for recording purposes.

Info: www.hughes-and-kettner.com

GUILD CALIFORNIA-MADE F-55 JUMBO

Guild has unveiled a beastly F-55 Jumbo, the first jumbo body size to be made in its California factory.

The F-55, formerly known as the F-50R, features a tight-grained solid Sitka spruce top with solid Indian rosewood back and sides.

Elegant cosmetic appointments variously include the classic Guild V-block inlays, gold Gotoh hardware, and a beautiful Nitrocellulose lacquer finish.

Available in Natural or Sunburst, and with LR Baggs Electronics.

Info: www.gibson.com

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Learn more at www.CortGuitars.com/gold.

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ASK THE EXPERTS

PERFORMANCE-RELATED PAIN CAN SEEM LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD FOR WORKING MUSICIANS. THIS MONTH, THE MUSICIANS' UNION GIVES SOME TIPS FOR HEALTHY PLAYING

The dilemma for all musicians is how to cope with performance-related pain, when rehearsals and performance are key to their work. It sounds obvious, but some element of rest is essential. Musicians should never attempt to play through the pain, according to advice from the BAPAM (British Association For Performing Arts Medicine), but neither should they completely cease playing either. Not using the muscles needed to play your instrument runs the risk of creating more problems when you begin to play again. It's a question of finding the right balance and working out what is right for you. Getting specialist medical advice is crucial.

> **"It can be difficult, in a working environment, to take a break in the middle of a rehearsal"**

Some clinicians advise that musicians should take a five-minute break every 20 minutes although this is often not a feasible option. "It can be difficult in a working environment to take a break in the middle of a rehearsal," says Diane Widdison, MU national organiser, Education and Training. "So ensure you have warmed up and stretched appropriately and make the most of any scheduled breaks to rest properly. Manage your workload so your body has time to recover."

"Musicians should view themselves more as musical athletes," says official BAPAM advice on the matter. "Taking greater care over their own health, fitness and wellbeing. Only by doing this will they minimise injury."

The MU in action

The MU provides help, advice, and resources for members with illnesses and can signpost appropriate organisations that can help.

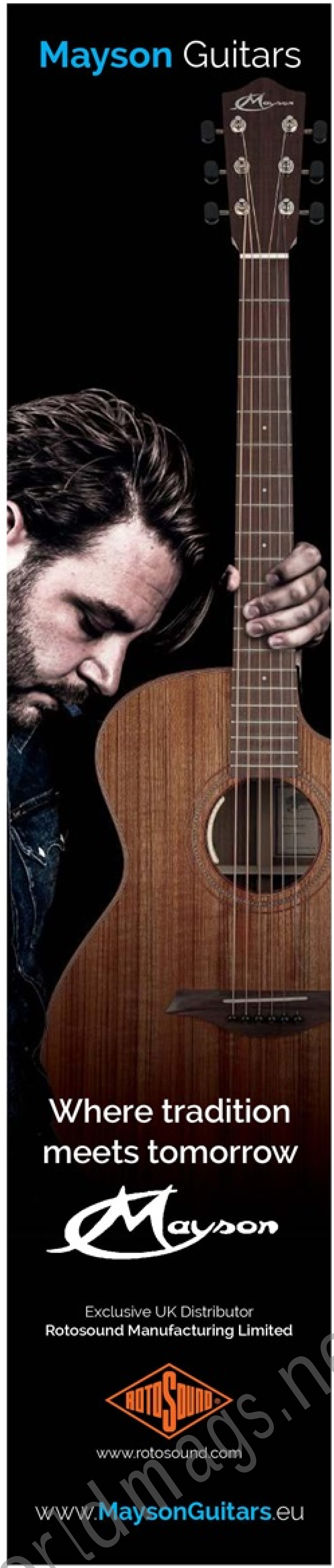
"Be aware of the importance of diet, rest, and exercise," Diane says. "Manage your work schedule so it isn't too onerous. Address problems as soon as possible, get help, and contact the MU. The BAPAM, Help Musicians UK and the Royal Society of Musicians can also help."

Diane notes that it is the freelance musician who finds it most difficult to deal with problems like musculoskeletal pain: "Musicians often ignore symptoms because they have to keep working as they are self-employed – usually with no sickness cover in place. It can be a combination of rest or changing technique which is the only way to help long-term, otherwise these issues become chronic. There is financial help available from the MU's Benevolent Fund and Help Musicians UK for musicians who are unable to work." ■

Useful helplines

BAPAM – 020 7404 8444
Help Musicians UK – 020 7239 9100
Music Minds Matter: 24/7 mental health support line and service for the music industry – 0808 8028008
Music Support – 0800 030 6789

Find out more about the MU's health and wellbeing work, as well as advice and useful resources, via theMU.org



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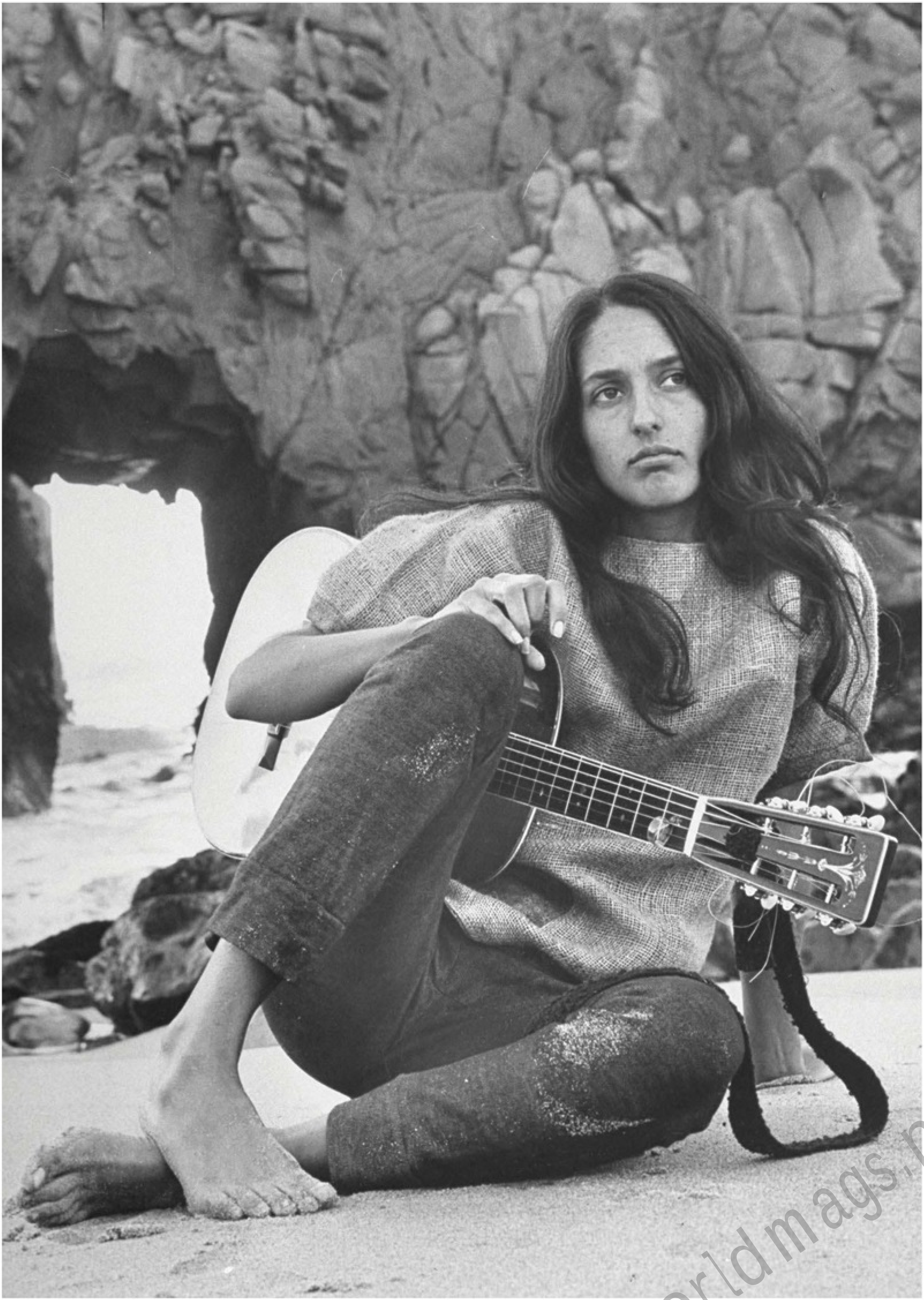

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JOAN BAEZ

After nearly six decades, Joan Baez says 2018 will be her final year of touring and her new album could well be her last. Dan Hobson chats to the queen of folk on the dawn of a new era

"I am happier than usual," chuckles Joan Baez as she delivers the verdict on her new album, *Whistle Down the Wind*. "It feels like the beginning for me." Indeed, Baez's first record for almost a decade burns bright with the fiery protest and social awareness that catapulted her to stardom in the 1960s. The album represents another new beginning for Baez, though. It symbolises the start of a new life away from the spotlight.

At the time Baez announced the album, she added that 2018 would be her last year of formal touring. "It was becoming clear to me that stuff is winding down," Baez says from her kitchen in Woodside, California. "I wouldn't say that this is definitely the last album, although I imagine that it is. I'm leaving that possibility open in case something happens and I feel the need to put another record out. But my feeling is that this year's tour will be the last. I won't stop singing necessarily, but I'll stop doing these formal extended tours that I have done for the last 55 years."

The reason Baez has drawn a line in the sand when it comes to extended touring is, quite simply, her voice. In the past, Baez described her singing voice as a gift which she, very humbly, took little credit for. Now, it seems, the gift that kept giving for six decades is not as generous as it once was. "It's so difficult to sing now, people have no idea," Baez admits. "I remember years and years ago asking a vocal coach how I'll know when it's time to quit. He said, 'Your voice will tell you'. For the first 30 years of my career I never even thought about my voice. Then, all of a sudden, I really have to think the whole thing out each time, which gets tedious. It's a lot of time and a lot of hard work – I think I'd rather be painting," she says with a laugh.

> "I work with what I have and I like what I have"

Despite Baez looking decades younger than her 77 years, maintaining her voice is a huge daily commitment. "Everybody's vocal cords are elastic to begin with and like every other muscle, you have to keep working them for them to be what you want them to be," she says. "But they'll never be what they were when you were younger. So you start the process of compensating here and there... I work with what I have and I like what I have, but it's still difficult. Especially the upper range stuff."

Recorded over a ten-day period at United Recording Studios in Los Angeles and produced by Joe Henry (Bonnie Raitt, Billy Bragg, Allen Toussaint), the album comprises a collection of covers and original songs by legends, including Tom Waits, Josh Ritter, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Eliza Gilkyson, Anohni, as well as lesser-known songwriters

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like Zoe Mulford, Tim Eriksen, and Eliza Gilkyson. The album, to be released on March 2, will be Baez's first record since 2008's *Day After Tomorrow*.

The title track, 'Whistle Down the Wind', originally written by Tom Waits for his 1992 album *Bone Machine*, received critical acclaim when it premiered in January. Other highlights on the album include Baez's version of 'The President Sang Amazing Grace', by Zoe Mulford. Baez's beautiful, crystal clear vocals shimmer over the piano arrangement with expressive lyrics such as "No words can say what must be said, for all the living and the dead". 'Last Leaf', by Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan, also seems a poignant number, considering the context of the record. "I'm the last leaf on the tree, the autumn took the rest, but they won't take me," goes the song's refrain.

One song that Baez feels is representative of the record is her stunning take on 'Another World' by Anohni. "That song is just so soulful and as dark as it is beautiful," Baez gushes. "The lyrics go 'I need another place, will there be peace, I need another world, this one's nearly gone, I'm gonna miss the birds, I'm gonna miss the trees' and so on. It's beautiful."

Josh Ritter, who chatted to *Acoustic* back in December, wrote two songs for Baez on the record after the pair became close while he was supporting her on tour. Both numbers, 'Be of Good Heart' and 'Silver Blade', are traditional folk arrangements in typical Ritter style with powerful, image-laden lyrics. Definite stand-outs on the album, Ritter's songs suit Baez's style extremely well. Overall, Baez is very pleased with the record.

"My idea of the future was the following Wednesday"

"There are songs that are very ballad-like. Then there are songs that are, I wouldn't say political, but socially aware. And I wouldn't say protest, but they certainly make people understand there are problems in the world."

Baez was born in Staten Island, New York, on January 9, 1941. Her father, Albert Baez, was born in Puebla, Mexico. Her mother, Joan Baez (née Bridge), was born in Edinburgh, Scotland. Baez had two sisters, Pauline Thalia Baez Bryan (1938–2016) and Mimi Fariña (1945–2001). Due to her father's work in healthcare and with UNESCO, the family moved many times when Baez was young, living in towns across the USA, as well as in England, France, Switzerland, Spain, Canada, and the Middle East.

Baez's musical journey began after she was given a ukulele by a friend of her father. "I amused myself at junior high school playing that ukulele," she remembers. "We moved a lot when I was young and I never really got settled with friends; I didn't have a lot of close friends. I found great comfort playing rhythm and blues mainly. It was really soothing for me. Then I found some terrible guitar in the attic and I played that for a while. Then it was getting clear that I was good at the guitar and wanted to keep going so I think I got a Goya gut-string guitar, then a huge Gibson. Ever since then, I've played Martins."

In 1958, the family moved to Massachusetts, which happened to be the centre of the emerging folk-scene. That year, at the Club 47 in Cambridge, a 17-year-old Baez played her first show. "Club 47 was like my home in the early days," Baez remembers. "I really flunked out of college and I wasn't there for more than about a month. My life

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became the coffee shops in Harvard Square. That's where I had the time to fall in love with that music and the talent to play it."

Around that time Baez met Bob Gibson and Odetta, the most prominent artists in the folk and gospel genre. Gibson invited Baez to perform with him at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival and the appearance led to her signing with Vanguard Records the following year. She released her first album, *Joan Baez*, in 1960 and it sold moderately well.

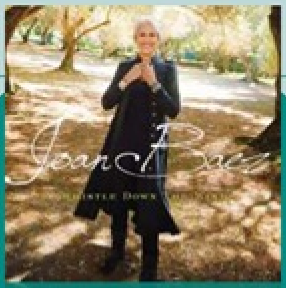
As somebody that has always strived to live in the moment, it never occurred to Baez at the time just how long and successful her career would go on to be. "Because I never had any ambition I never thought about things like that at the time," Baez says. "Even if you have a lot of ambition, it doesn't matter anyway, you don't know what's going to happen. Probably the difference between me and some people nowadays, who *are* thinking about their career, is that they want to be there forever and I guess I never really thought about that. My idea of the future was the following Wednesday," she laughs. "As much as possible, I try and live in the moment. That's good old Buddhist teaching for you."

Despite Baez's lack of ambition, her second release, *Joan Baez, Vol. 2* (1961), went gold, as did *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 1* (1962) and *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2* (1963). From the early-to-mid-1960s, Baez emerged at the forefront of the American roots revival, where she introduced her audiences to the then-unknown Bob Dylan. In 1963, Baez began touring with Dylan and recording his music, a bond that came to symbolise the folk music movement for the next two years.

In the late 1960s, Baez began writing many of her own songs, beginning with 'Sweet Sir Galahad' and 'A Song For David', which both appeared on her 1970 album, *(I Live) One Day At A Time*. "I taught myself how to play guitar and sing, I think we all did in the coffee shops early on. Saying you didn't have formal lessons didn't really mean anything because copying everybody else was how everybody was learning. I'm sure I could have learned a lot of different techniques, but I just copied others and hoped for the best.

"I started writing my own songs about 10 years in. It never dawned on me to write initially. One day somebody said, 'Why aren't you writing your own stuff?'. So I wrote 'Sweet Sir Galahad' as the first one. And I thought, 'Well, this is pretty good' and I just kept writing."

After 11 years with Vanguard, Baez cut ties with the label in 1971. She delivered them one last success with the gold-selling album *Blessed Are...* (1971) which included a top-



WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND TRACK LISTING

1 **Whistle Down The Wind (Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan)**
2 Be Of Good Heart (Josh Ritter)
3 **Another World (ANOHNI)**
4 Civil War (Joe Henry)
5 **The Things We Are Made Of (Mary Chapin Carpenter)**
6 The President Sang Amazing Grace (Zoe Mulford)
7 **Last Leaf (Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan)**
8 Silver Blade (Josh Ritter)
9 **The Great Correction (Eliza Gilkyson)**
10 I Wish The Wars Were All Over (Tim Eriksen)

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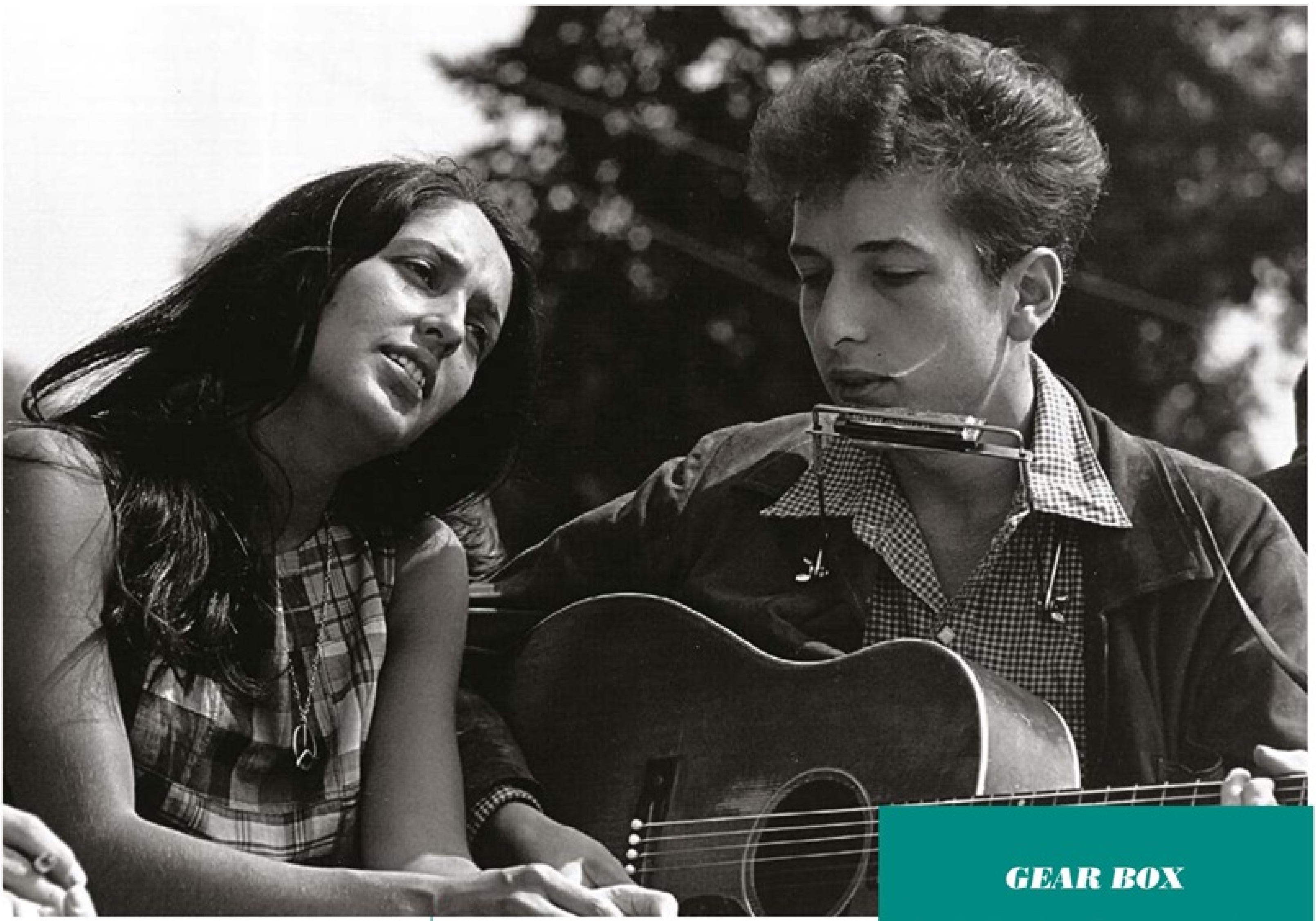

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ten hit in 'The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down', her cover of The Band's signature song. With *Come from the Shadows* (1972), Baez switched to A&M Records, where she remained for four years and six albums.

While the 80s and 90s were a time where Baez reflected on her place in a musical landscape that often didn't honour folk, she continued to perform at benefits and fundraisers for social and political causes around the world. She also maintained her recording output with albums like *Speaking of Dreams* (1989) and *Ring Them Bells* (1995). Her first album of the new millennium was 2003's *Dark Chords On A Big Guitar*, followed up by a collection of live tracks in 2005 on *Bowery Songs*, featuring tracks by Dylan and Woody Guthrie, as well as traditional folk. Baez was honored with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007 and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on April 7, 2017. With such a long and illustrious music career, not to mention her activism, it is impossible for Baez to pick a highlight. "Gosh, how could I? There would be 50 highlights, I'm sure," she chuckles.

Baez's 2018 tour is certainly set to be a highlight, though. With shows in the UK, Ireland, Europe, the USA, and with more dates to be announced, it is set to be a monumental and fitting exit for the queen of folk. Can we expect any surprises for the final tour, though? "The surprise is that I'm still doing it," she jokes, playing her cards close to her chest.

For anyone keen to know the secret of Baez's longevity and radiant health, the answer is simple. "It all comes down to that word nobody likes to hear: discipline. Discipline about what I eat, how I keep up physically, meditation, different kinds of stretching and exercise. If you don't take it very seriously it slips – and you slip."

Will she ever allow herself a break? "Maybe I'll loosen up a little bit at some point," she says with a laugh. "While I'm still traveling I would like to look a certain way and I would like to have a certain kind of energy and that means that I stick with all the rules I've made for myself. Maybe when I quit touring, I'll let myself go," Baez jokes. "You really can't tell." Somehow, we doubt it. ■

Joan Baez's new album *Whistle Down the Wind* is out on March 2 via Proper Records. Tickets for her final tour are on sale now. Info: www.joanbaez.com

GEAR BOX

For the live shows I have two guitars, both Martin 0-45s. My son (Gabriel Harris) plays percussion and a guy named Dirk Powell plays around seven different instruments. A young woman, Grace Stumberg, sings with me on and off throughout the show, which is really refreshing. Some of the high notes that I don't make anymore, she does double on them.

My personal collection is very small, I must have five guitars in total. The two Martins I use are replicas of the Martin 1929 0-45 I bought for $200 in 1962. I hadn't played that guitar for years. Although, I packed it up, bought it a seat on the plane and took it to the recording session for this album and that's the first time I've played it for decades.

An amusing story about that guitar is that when it went in to be fixed in 1996, the repairman took it apart and found a scroll inside which said 'too bad you're a communist'. It must have been done by a repairman years ago who disputed my politics. When the 0-45 was replicated for a 1997 edition, a backwards label bearing the same slogan was adhered to the inside of the soundboard so that it could be read with an inspection mirror.

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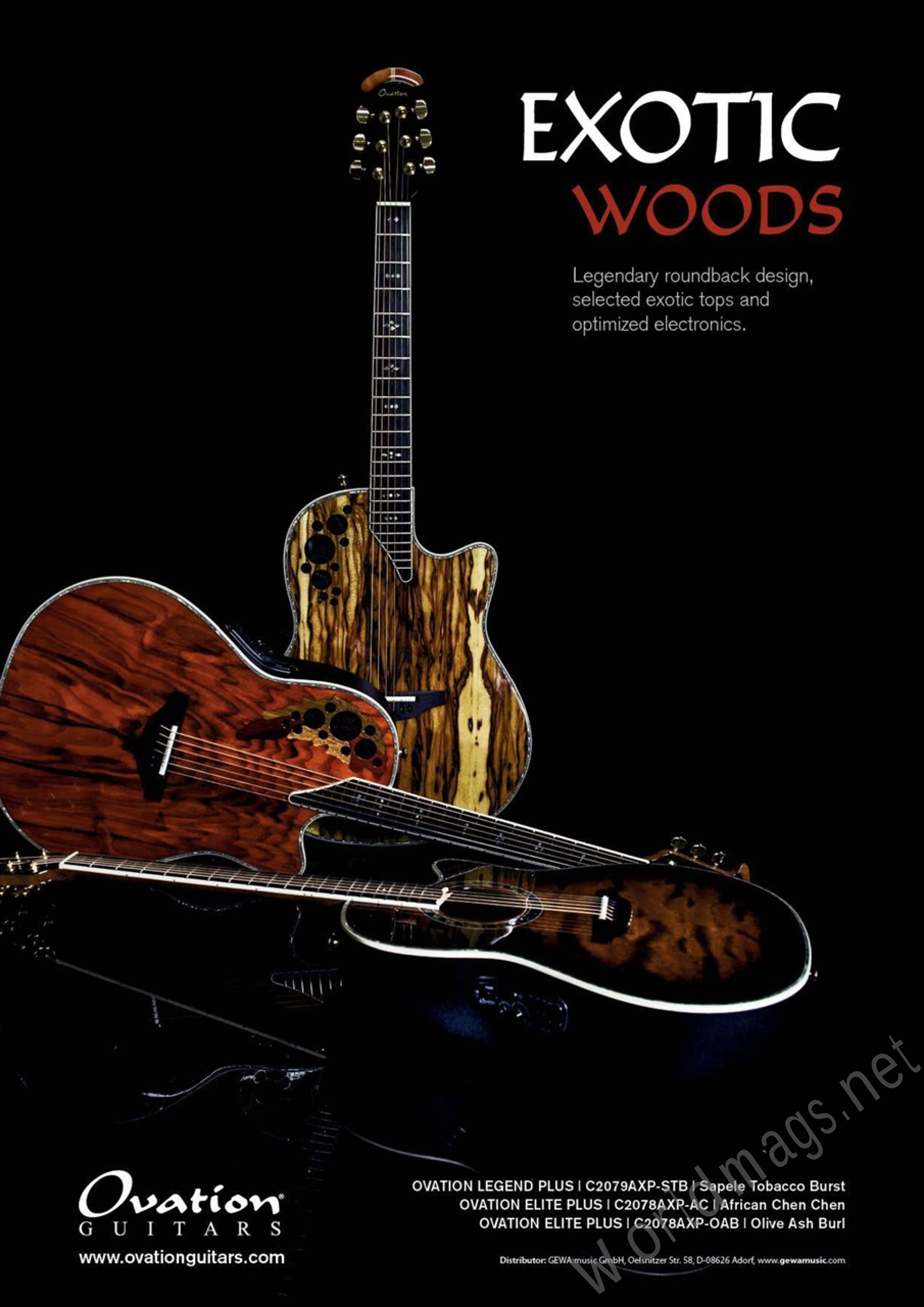

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DARLINGSIDE

Folk quartet Darlingside are a band who like some unique sounds. Emily Bielby caught up with Don Mitchell to get the lowdown on new record Extralife.

"There's definitely lots of it on this one," says Don Mitchell when asked about the acoustic content on Darlingside's upcoming record. "The track 'Old Friend' is probably the most acoustic track on the album, and a local luthier here in Somerville, Massachusetts near where we live called Yukon Stubblebine (Stubblebine Lutherie) built the guitar that we used extensively on the record. The guitar is tuned down to C so the whole guitar is tuned down a third, which is sort of between a regular guitar and a baritone and this guitar showed up pretty frequently on the album.

"The track 'Hold Your Head Up High' is one of the advanced tracks that's coming out this month, and that one also has that low baritone range guitar but it's playing in tandem with a Garrison Nashville-strung guitar, just the top strings of a 12-string guitar. Luckily, we just ran into a number of people who had great ideas about different ways to expand our acoustic palette for this album," admits Don.

I ask the multi-instrumentalist how the album compares to the band's last two records. "This one has some tracks that are more acoustic than our previous stuff and it has other tracks that are way less, with arpeggiators and interstellar kind of space sounds."

Surprisingly the indie-folk quartet – consisting of Don Mitchell, Auyon Mukharji, Harris Paseltiner, and David Senft – do have some shared influences, despite all growing up exposed to a variety of different styles and genres of music, whether it be world music, classical string quartets, folk, or local Irish bands. I pick Don's brain on his and Harris' biggest influences and the artists/bands who had an impact on their decision to learn the guitar. "When I was starting to get serious about guitar and guitarists, it was around the time when John Mayer was getting quite bigger, I wouldn't say that he's one of my biggest influences nowadays but at the time when I was a teenager it was the coolest thing in the world that there was this guy playing acoustic guitar who had really intricate jazz chords and things like that. I also really liked the guys in Guster and their acoustic stuff – I'm not sure if they're as big in the UK. I also liked Aerosmith and I remember learning some electric guitar licks very early on from them. I'm not sure who Harris's [Harris Paseltiner, guitar, cello and vocals) biggest influences were, but he liked some heavier stuff and was very into Radiohead and even a little bit of Tool but those things aren't directly applicable to what we're doing now."

The first guitar Don got his hands on was a cheap black and white Stratocaster copy which he could use to start practicing with, but living in a dormitory, learning on an acoustic

PLAYER'S TIPS

What do you consider the most important ingredients for developing your own acoustic style?

Don "I use the guitar as more of a tool for creating a bed for the songs and I think that figuring out ways on the acoustic guitar in particular, knowing when to back off and be a rhythmic player rather than doing anything to flashy. I'm not a great solo player, it's just never been my focus, I'm more for finding chords that connect really well to each other and rather than just playing some barre chords, how can I hold down some shapes that have notes in common in the same range on the guitar?"

Harris "...and make sure you practice in both a seated position and a standing position."

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seemed like a much more sensible idea. "I got a Seagull guitar which is sort of a starter brand made in Canada and I do still have that and it even still has some blood splatters around the sound hole from when I would play for so long that my fingers would get torn up and bleed on the instrument," he laughs. Having had a few lessons at the age of 12 going on 13 towards the end of eighth grade, Don very quickly discovered a new learning game through the use of the radio. "The lessons didn't continue because I went to a different high school in a different area and at that point I just listened to songs on the radio and self-taught from there; I wanted to write my own songs that sounded like the ones on the radio so I would take the chords of the songs on the radio and then start writing my own melodies over those and things just went from there."

It was a very different route into guitar playing for Harris who came from playing cello and knowing a lot of music theory, which is easily transferable for learning acoustic when combined with internet tablature and a good ear for music when figuring out bass notes, chords and learning by doing. Dave Senft (bass, kick drum and vocals), however, picked the guitar up a lot later, as a way of backing up his songwriting; learning from friends and in a similar fashion to both Don and Harris.

Gathering inspiration from everything and anything, the writing process is a four-man job, with everyone bringing their own musical skill set with them to get the job done. "We get ideas for our songs from all over, whether it be life, reading, movies, friends and lines of dialogue that we hear people say in real life and we write four ways so we all throw ideas in to the mix and combine forces that way as we're drafting up a song. Given that all of us do some of the writing, some of the writing isn't done on acoustic guitar at all, some of it starts on a mandolin, banjo, but Harris writes primarily on the Santa Cruz. I write sometimes on the Tacoma when I'm at home and other times I'll write on the electric when I'm on the road," clarifies Don. ■

***Extralife* is out on February 23.**
Info: www.darlingside.com

Bob from Stubblebine Lutherie describes how they came up with the 'Coalburner' guitar used by Don on the new record.
"All of the wood for this instrument was harvested in the Appalachian Mountains from Virginia to Maine. C for the cherry back and sides from Pennsylvania, O for the Osage orange neck from Virginia, A for the Adirondack spruce top from Maine and L for the locust fingerboard and bridge from New Hampshire; that's how the acronym COAL came about. Also around the time I was building this guitar (and before and since) I was listening to Session Americana a lot and Jimmy Fitting was frequently performing the track 'Coalburner' – a song about a train. The long scale, and hence low tunings this guitar is capable of, make it a powerful engine of sound, a lot like a train so the name just fell in to place."

GEARBOX

What gear do you use?
Harris: "The Santa Cruz H-model, which is an orchestra cut for the top and back with a dreadnought depth –this is the main band instrument that we bring on the road so Dave and I both play it during the live sets.

"Also, get a Kyser Short-Cut 3-String acoustic capo, it changed my life! All of the open tuning goodness with the same chordal positions as standard tuning."

Don: "Hollow-body 'telecaster' electric guitar with p90s by Luke Jackson (Huron Guitars), a baritone acoustic and a mandocello loaned to us by Dammann Custom instruments. A Tacoma Jumbo guitar, which is now owned by Fender and that was the second acoustic guitar I owned, it was a graduation gift from my mum not used on the record. A Garrison acoustic guitar that Stubblebine Lutherie set up for us with the bottom four strings tuned up an octave ("Nashville-strung") recorded on quite a few tracks with this."

How would you recommend players develop a good acoustic sound live?
Don: "No matter how good your acoustic guitar is, it's probably not going to sound as good as you'd like it to in a live setting, in a band so if you can get away with it, sticking a mic in front of the soundhole is the best thing, although if you're playing with other people and you need the separation and you need a pick up system, I think having a luthier that you really trust can be very helpful. Also, looking at a cheaper range of guitars and plugging them in to some acoustic amplifiers or a PA system and finding someway to test what it sounds like plugged in."

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ALELA DIANE

The Portland-based folk musician tells George King why pregnancy, label politics and an eBay-bought Martin made her new album all the richer

Sex, love and heartbreak are topics never far from the tip of a singer-songwriter's tongue when they first prepare to partner lyrics with melodies. Stories drawing from the joyous miracle and intricate art of childbirth, however, coupled with the trials and tribulations of motherhood, are often neglected by songwriters – despite seemingly having an equally universal appeal.

But maybe this taboo isn't entirely the fault of the artists themselves. When I speak with Portland-based folk musician Alela Diane on the day before New Years Eve, she's quick to point out that music from female artists is sold based on their sex appeal, and so in the eyes of the industry at least, a female musician becoming and singing about being a mother isn't exactly marketable – sadly, she knows from experience.

After being dropped by Rough Trade Records after her 2011 album *Alela Diane & Wild Divine*, Alela found herself without a record label – and the hunt to find a replacement for her critically-acclaimed fourth album, *About Farewell*, proved problematic for one simple, discriminatory reason: she was pregnant.

"As soon as [record labels] found out I was pregnant, it was totally off the table," says Alela. "They assumed because I was having a kid, I suddenly was obsolete and wouldn't be able to continue working."

Eventually, Alela released her LP via Rusted Blue Records in July 2013 – four months prior to the birth of her first daughter Vera Marie and over a year after her divorce from her first husband and then band member, Tom Bevitori. The record unsurprisingly centered on both heartbreak and the turbulent times leading up to the pair's inevitable departure from one another, and its predominantly stripped-back sound and pondering sense of poignancy, begged to be performed in intimate venues and music halls. But, towards the tail end of her pregnancy, Alela naturally and understandably had to, if for only a few months at least, withdraw from doing any live performances.

"People think you can't be out on the road – and you can't. But that doesn't mean I didn't intend to keep working and creating. You still make music and still put out work that is important."

The music industry has some rather transparent double standards when it comes to a female musician's exploration of motherhood in song; yet when a male musician embraces the theme of fatherhood they can do no wrong. And as Alela suggests, society's outdated view that it is the mother who must stay at home with their newborn needs to be eradicated.

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> **"Pregnancy didn't mean I didn't intend to keep creating"**

"Male artists can have children and they can go on tour more easily, leave the family at home and no one thinks about it all, because women inherently have such an intense role in the child rearing and bearing years. It's the expectation that the women will be at home taking care of the kids and that's not always the case. It's a lot easier for men to just kind of leave and to separate those two things," Alela says.

Following the birth of Vera, 34-year-old Alela granted herself a yearlong musical sabbatical, before returning to the studio as part of a collaborative effort with fellow Portland folk artist, Ryan Francesconi. The writing and recording process of the pair's release, *Cold Moon*, saw Alela take somewhat of a back seat, as she eased her way back into being a musician and prepared to juggle for the first time her work and her newly-acquired domestic lifestyle. Despite writing the entirety of the record's lyrics and melodies, she assures me, perhaps rather modestly, that her involvement was minimal.

"At the time, that was about all I could do," she states. "I only really made half of a record and there wasn't that much on me – Ryan wrote all the music."

Nonetheless, the project succeeded in re-quenching Alela's thirst for making music and after the album was finished, she felt her "own music and songs" starting to come back to her. Her altered perspective of life, motherhood and the changes she had experienced over the past 12 months – as well as performing in Paris on the same evening as the Bataclan massacre – had resulted in both a newfound voice, experiences to reflect on and topics to write about; Alela's sense of purpose as a musician had been reinstated. But in order for these emotions and stories to materialise into fully formed songs and make the 11-song tracklisting for her latest album *Cusp*, Alela had to isolate and remove herself from the creatively sparse, and at times tense environment by which she had been consumed by since becoming a mother. So, in January 2016, she ventured to Caldera, Oregon and spent three and a half weeks in a snow-surrounded cabin by herself, with only a grand piano for company.

"For me to create, there needs to be space," she acknowledges, cracking a wry smile as she

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Gear Box

"I'm currently playing two acoustic guitars – a 1973 Martin 00018 and the guitar I keep at home is a 1950 Martin 018. I like them a lot and they are nice guitars. I got the '73 from eBay when I first started touring a lot and I put a pickup in it. I used to wear big belt buckles though, so the back of it has a really nice belt buckle wound on it, which I feel bad about, but it still plays really well."

does so. "It was really relaxing and wonderful and it was an extremely nurturing time for my whole self. My songs were able to come out of that like a form of healing and I just needed some time to come back to myself and to find my creativity again."

Shortly after returning from her writer's get-away, Alela conceived again. She was about to head into the studio but there was nothing to worry about in that respect: headed by Pete M. Murray, the recording process was a breeze – the 'easiest record' she's ever had to make. Unlike other, more dictating producers Alela admits to having worked with, Peter was able to rid her of any well worn habits and his democratic approach allowed Alela to work more off of her own intuition, ultimately making for a more flawless and smooth experience. The birth itself, however, was far from straightforward. On the very weekend that *Cusp* was mixed in Los Angeles, Alela prematurely went into labor, giving rise to severe and near-fatal complications and culminating in a near-death experience.

"I had something similar to preeclampsia and I nearly bled to death," she nonchalantly states. "So, it was a really lovely time for me, but when I did live and my life was saved and when you have a moment in life when you feel your mortality so intensely like I did, it just makes you appreciate everyday so much more and I am not taking anything for granted – and the same goes for this experience of being able to share my music."

> "For me to create, there needs to be space"

Being her first solo output since becoming a mother, *Cusp* has Alela's trademark autobiographical stamp, and inspects every aspect of motherhood and the yo-yoing emotions that can come with it. Its soundscape and lyrical content are as tender as they are harrowing, as Alela surveys a whole manner of topics for the first time through the lens of a mother; from death by childbirth, to how the international refugee crisis is impacting Syrian toddlers. But perhaps the most compassionate moment is when Alela's reflection of her frequently complex relationship with her own mother, gives birth to a revelation.

"I think the thing that has changed is that I understand where she was coming from as my mother and I understand that having children is extremely challenging. There is a line in that song that says 'I never knew how much you loved me' because I had no idea to what extent a mother can love their children and it's not a two way street. My kids do not probably love me as much as I love them – and that's painful." ■

Alela Diane's fifth album *Cusp* is out now.
Info: aleladiane.com

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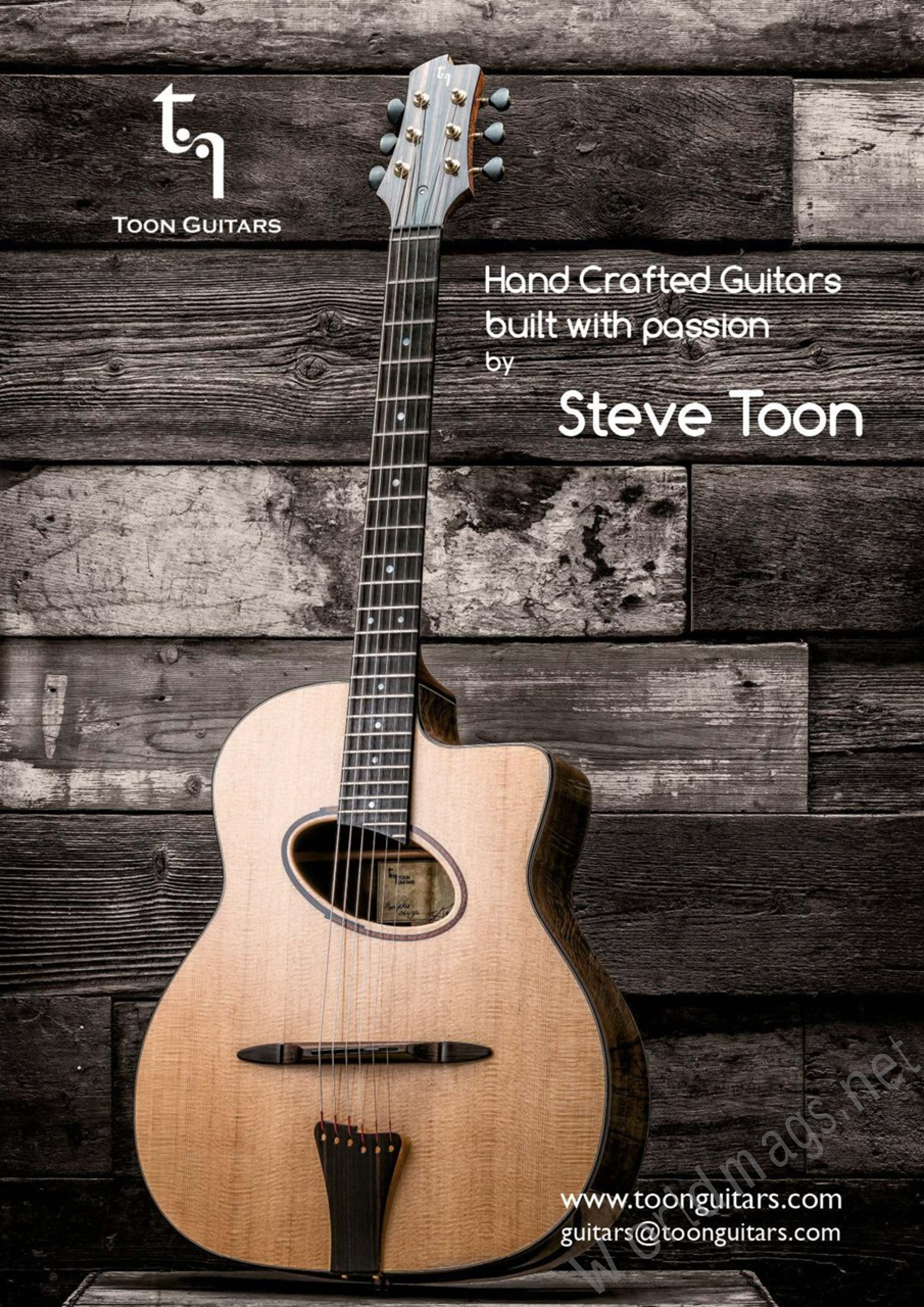

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I'M WITH HER

The renowned singer-songwriter Sarah Jarosz returns, this time in a trio, with a new album and world tour. Joel McIver finds out more...

You're probably aware that acoustic country and folk music with an Americana flavour is alive and well, but you might not know that the musicians writing the music aren't necessarily old geezers called Martha and Jeb. A young, cool and largely independent wave of songwriters and performers are currently spreading the roots word on the other side of the pond – prominent among them 26-year-old Sarah Jarosz, and her band I'm With Her.

Jarosz (pronounced 'jah-rose') has been in *Acoustic* before, promoting her solo work, for which she has been rewarded with Grammy awards and other serious recognition. This time she's playing guitar, mandolin and banjo alongside fellow performers Sara Watkins (violin, ukulele) and Aoife O'Donovan (guitar, piano) in the new group, whose debut album *See You Around* – produced by Ethan Johns of Ryan Adams and Paul McCartney fame – is out now. The trio will be performing in the UK in May, and to tie in, Jarosz gave us a call to discuss all things acoustic.

How did I'm With Her come together, Sarah?
It's been moving forward since the summer of 2014, but we'd all been running into each other as friends on the music scene for a long time before that. I met Sara when I was nine years old and Aoife when I was 15. We used to meet at events and jam together in an informal setting, and we finally all crossed paths at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival in Colorado in 2014, which is where we decided to really go for it.

Tell us about the songwriting.
We did the first songwriting session in Los Angeles in July 2015; we wrote four songs, one of which was 'See You Around', the first single. In December that year we wrote the rest of the songs in Vermont. The writing was mostly a joint effort, apart from a couple of songs where one of us wrote the music and the others wrote the lyrics.

Do you prefer working in a band or solo?
From my perspective, it's been really nice because since I've been performing, I've always done it under my own name. It's a cool change of scenery for me to be in my first band and to be an equal team-member with these two amazing women. I'm learning a lot from this experience.

What, specifically?
I'm learning how to be a better listener, and how to be a better supporter of what's going on musically, on stage and in the studio. This couldn't have come at a better time for me. I think the others both feel that as well. We all released solo records in 2016 so we're all delighted to have the chance to do this collaboration. Bands don't always click, so the ease of communication that came so quickly for the three of us was a big part of why we wanted to create music together. None of us are saying 'We have to play one of my songs now!' which is a big strength of this band.

Is the band name you chose a reference to gender politics?
No. We formed this band long before the 2016 election, so it's just a coincidence that 'I'm With Her' was also Hillary Clinton's campaign slogan. It's about us all coming to this band after having solo careers. It's an even playing field; we're all in this together. The name seemed to catch on with our friends, so it stuck.

Will you be touring?
We've just announced a huge world tour, starting in February. We'll be in the UK in January and then back in May. There are places I've never played – Germany and Denmark for example – and I'm very excited.

What acoustic gear does the band use?
I play a Fletcher Brock octave mandolin and a Collings MF5 mandolin, as well as a Collings guitar and a banjo; Aoife plays Martin acoustic guitars, as well as piano and synth.

Do the acoustic instruments travel well?
Yes, although that's always the hardest part of any travel plan. I'm travelling with four acoustic instruments and I can't physically bring them all on the plane with me, so I have to check them in. Luckily, I have heavy-duty flightcases and I'm pretty confident in them... knock on wood. I'm constantly trying to figure out the best way to go about it.

Have you considered emulating the different acoustic instruments through a guitar pedal, so you could travel with less gear?
I can't really do what I do on the mandolin on the guitar. Also, one of the cool things about this band is that we're constantly switching the sonic palette. It's not like we're all on the same instruments through the entire show. What's great is that we can all trade off instruments, and that vocally we're also pretty comfortable

Opposite page © Lindsey Byrnes

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I'm With Her (l-r) Sarah Jarosz, Aoife O'Donovan, and Sara Watkins

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with each of the parts – it's not like one of us always has to sing the low part or the high part. It's really nice to move around the parts in a three-part situation.

How do you amplify your acoustic gear on stage?

I'm in the process of figuring out exactly how I'm going to do it on this tour, actually, but for my own shows I've been using a pedalboard of four Radial Tonebones, which are especially great with the octave mandolin and the banjo. I also have a K&K Sound pickup mounted in my instruments.

Why did you decide to work with producer Ethan Johns on the album?

I've been a big fan of Ethan's work for a long time, although he's such a proponent of using the first take that it took us a while to settle in with him. We had to figure out a balance. We would record a first take and we would be treating it as if we were warming up – but when we went to do a second take, he said 'There was so much magic in that first one!'

"It's a cool change of scenery to be in my first band"

It was the polar opposite to how I'd recorded before, but after a while he figured out what we needed when it came to leaning towards the perfectionist side. He was great at bringing out the rawness and the mistakes that sometimes make recordings so special, though. Considering we're a new band and that what we've done so far is mostly live, it was really important to capture that magic for the record.

Why choose Real World studios near Bath for the sessions?

Once the three of us had decided that we wanted to work with Ethan, and once he'd told us that he was super-keen to work with us, it made sense for us to travel over. It was also psychologically important for the three of us to get as far away from home as possible and to be at a secluded place like Real World. That way we could fully give ourselves to this process. We lived together in that studio and we ate every single meal together – literally breakfast, lunch and dinner – so it was an incredibly immersive experience! ■

***See You Around* is out now.**
Info: http://imwithherband.com

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SARAH MCQUAID

With her fifth album just out, singer-songwriter Sarah McQuaid chatted to Dan Hobson about the record, as well as her love of guitars and DADGAD

PHOTOS: PHIL NICHOLLS

There are two types of guitarists in this world. For some, if it has six strings and it's in-tune, that's all that matters. For others, exploring tonewoods, craft and build technique can almost be more interesting than the playing itself. Singer-songwriter Sarah McQuaid definitely falls into the latter category. McQuaid, whose first job was in a music shop, loves her guitars almost as much as her open tunings. In fact, it was a struggle to stay on the subject of her fifth studio album, *If We Dig Any Deeper It Could Get Dangerous*, at times.

Produced by guitar icon Michael Chapman, the mesmerisingly melancholy album is dominated by musings of mortality. The record takes McQuaid's style into a deeper, more ethereal place altogether too, with subtle shades of electronica over her typical folk stylings. Made possible with support from Arts Council England Grants For The Arts, and from Cultivator, this record should definitely help McQuaid's music reach new audiences.

Born in Madrid, raised in Chicago and now living in rural England after stints in Paris and Ireland, McQuaid is a singer-songwriter who has certainly seen the world. In April 2017, she was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Ards International Guitar Festival in Newtownards, Northern Ireland (previous recipients include legendary guitarists Davey Graham, John Renbourn, John Martyn, Martin Simpson, Pierre Bensusan and Martin Carthy) in recognition of her innovative use of the DADGAD tuning and her authorship of *The Irish DADGAD Guitar Book*. She regularly presents workshops on the DADGAD tuning at festivals, music schools and venues around the globe, and is working on a follow-up book on DADGAD song accompaniment.

Acoustic chatted to McQuaid weeks before her album hit the shelves.

So your fifth album is out soon and sounds great. Are you happy with the end result?
Yes, really pleased. It's most of my own songs and some instrumentals. It's a change from my previous albums as I'm playing both acoustic and electric guitars on this album. I'm still playing my Andy Manson acoustic guitar on most of the tracks, but I'm also playing my old Martin D-28. Michael Chapman who produced the album was very keen to get me playing electric guitar and he handed me an Ibanez artist model. I'd never played electric guitar before and I loved it. Acoustic has always been my first love, but I do play electric on four of the tracks. I'm also playing piano on this album for a change.

Congratulations on securing funding for the record too...
Thank you. I honestly don't know how I would have done it otherwise. I didn't have a plan B – I guess it would have been beg, borrow, steal.

You've got a really busy touring schedule for the rest of the year. Are you excited?
I'm excited to be going back on tour again. While I played a lot of festivals and one-off shows, I didn't do any extended tours last year because I wanted to focus on writing and recording the album. I'm really glad I took that decision because I don't know how I would have coped otherwise. I like when you're touring and playing the same set every night; honing it with each gig. I love performing live, I love the interaction with the audiences and the feedback you get; I kind of crave that. I miss it when I don't have it. I love the tightrope feeling when it's just you and the audience; it's scary but a challenge – a huge high. It'll be hard being away from my family, though. I have a husband and two kids and it's tough being apart from them.

How did you first get into playing music?
My mother got me into playing piano when I was around three. My mother also got me into playing guitar around eight. I never took guitar lessons, just self taught. Around 13, I used to sit for hours and listen to albums by people who worked with open tunings like Michael Hedges, Alex De Grassi, William Ackerman, Joni Mitchell. A lot of the time I would randomly try tuning my guitar different ways because I knew they were using alternative tunings, but I didn't know what they were.

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People are so lucky now with all the tuition online. But I'm old enough that I sat with LP records; listening again and again.

What was the first guitar you owned?
I still have my first guitar, it was a second hand Yamaha FG 375S, a really nice solid top guitar. My first job after finishing university was working in a music shop called Vintage Instruments, in Philadelphia. That was fantastic because there were dozens and dozens of guitars: beautiful old Gibsons, Martins, and Guilds. That's where I got my D-28, it took me two years to pay for it out of my wages.

You like your guitars, then?
Yeah, absolutely. I've always been really fascinated by guitars, the different tonewoods. It was so amazing to meet Andy Manson and have a guitar made by him; to go to his workshop and see all the different woods he was using. I've always been intrigued by the craftsmanship side of things. Andy builds each guitar differently, depending on the piece of wood he's using – every single guitar is different. A lot of people have requested a similar guitar to the one he built for me and he now calls it his Bluebird model.

What's your perfect guitar then?
My Manson! It's made with English cherry, which is nice because it isn't endangered or protected and doesn't cause any problems when crossing borders. It's a small guitar, around the size of a Martin 000, with a big sound and very comfortable to play. My Martin D-28 is a huge thing. I used to have a Guild F5 12-string too, which was massive, but I had to sell it as I needed the money and wasn't using it enough.

What year is the Martin?
The D-28 is 1965. It's Brazilian rosewood which means it's not safe to travel with. Theoretically I can carry evidence of when it was made but it's not worth the risk that it could be confiscated. But it is a beautiful old guitar and I love it.

What gear are you using for live shows?
I'll be playing the Manson for the majority of the show. I put that through a Trace Elliot acoustic preamp. They don't make them anymore, but it gives it a really nice acoustic sound when I put it through the PA. I'll also have the Ibanez electric with me and I have a little Vox amp for that.

Tell me about your songwriting process?
When I was making my previous album I happened on a process that worked really well. I kept getting song ideas, guitar riffs, or lyrics, or ideas, but I would force myself not to finish the songs. Then I'd go into the studio with all these scraps of ideas and finish all the songs together. It just means that there's a strong sense of continuity on the album. It's worked really well this time too.

"Acoustic has always been my first love"

Do you have any tips for readers?
The thing that took me the longest to learn was not thinking about it too much. If you're struggling with a riff, or a song, just leave it, let it percolate and when you come back to it, it often just happens. Leaving things to one side, deliberately not thinking about it, and coming back to it after a while is a great technique. Trust your brain to do the work.

Which artist, dead or alive, would you most like to jam with?
I've loved James Taylor's music for a long time. So, yeah, I'd love to jam with James.

Finally then, you were honoured with a Lifetime Achievement award by the Ards International Guitar Festival, Northern Ireland. How did that feel?
I was not expecting it at all. I had done my gig at the festival and the audience was calling for an encore. And the compere walked onstage and said, 'Before we get Sarah back on, we are going to present this Lifetime Achievement award'. And I'm so thick that it didn't occur to me that I was the one about to get the award. I was thinking, 'Oh, man, that's aggravating, I was going to get an encore and now they're gonna get this famous guitarist out onstage for the award – how dare they?!' I was looking in the wings for this other guitarist. It didn't occur to me. I was amazed when they read my name, I had no prior warning. It was amazing, I'm totally floored by it. ■

***If We Dig Any Deeper It Could Get Dangerous* is out now. Info: www.sarahmcquaid.com**

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WILL VARLEY

British folk artist Will Varley chats all about ghosts, Gibsons and Greenwich Village to Glenn Kimpton

"It's about a night out in Minneapolis, when an apparition or ghost appeared between some skyscrapers at four in the morning," starts Will Varley, rather intriguingly, as we discuss some of the narrative songs that make up his new *Spirit of Minnie* album, this one in particular being the title track. "The story was told to me by a taxi driver and a couple of other people on a very cold night in Minneapolis," he explains.

"Each song has its own life really, and I'm quite bad at writing whole albums as consistent pieces," he continues. "I tend to write individual songs without connecting points in between. I really like modern folk tales and I have songs about various things in quite recent times that sound like they come from a different time; I quite like the idea and 'Spirit of Minnie' is another example of that." And the old stuff? "Yeah I'm certainly a fan of older folk songs too," he nods. "My entry point was Dylan and Neil Young and that 60s and 70s Springsteen stuff. But from that, I've spent a lot of time sitting in the back of folk clubs and open mic nights and seeing that more English sound in raw, older folk, which is great."

Interestingly, *Minnie* is the broadest of Will's albums and the first to incorporate a full band setup to record. "It was quite a strange experience for me," he admits. "After four albums with just me and a guitar with some layering of vocal lines or violin done after that take, this was weird and a bit nerve-wracking. But as soon as we got the first couple of takes done it was fine, because we just did it the same way, which was running the album live, so what you're hearing is essentially live takes. I think it feels like quite a live record and quite alive too, which was important to me."

It's certainly a very different sound to the spareness of last year's *Kingsdown Sundown* album. "That one was pretty much just me and an acoustic guitar with virtually nothing added," he says. "As soon as I started writing these songs it was clear they were going to lean towards a fuller arrangement and by the time I had nine or ten songs I knew I wanted to bring a band in."

Although the band is all present and correct, it is clear that Will is primarily a guitar playing singer, and the space from those minimally adorned albums is noticeable at points on this one. "Well, to me, silence has been a band member of mine from when I was first starting out," he grins. "No noise is an element of my palette and it feels like there are times when that band member does return, and although it's rarer on this record than any other I've made, it's there… Silence is still in the band, just having a bit of a funny time!" And the guitar and vocal is still noticeably very much in the foreground. "Yeah that was a very conscious decision," Will agrees. "When you listen to any of my records, it is all about the lyric and the vocal, and Cameron [McVey, producer]

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was very keen on keeping that going. I've always been more into words than anything else, even back when I was a kid writing stupid little poems, it was all about the words. In a way, I'm still just writing stupid little poems from what I hear in a pub garden verbal interaction, but that's what I like to do..."

Thankfully for us music fans, Will decided against just writing poetry and instead accompanied it with melodies to create songs, eventually made with the guitar. "I started out playing piano," he remembers. "But I got to 13 and couldn't lug that around to a mate's house to play, so the guitar became the much more portable and convenient option. And around that time I got into Bob Dylan and that sort of classic idea of coffee houses. I remember being in my local coffee house in Kingston and thinking I was incredibly 'Greenwich Village', you know? The guitar is synonymous with that kind of image and sound, which is pretty much how I got into it. But there's something that happens when you put words or poetry to music that transcends the sum of its parts to become something else."

After a brief chat about favourite Dylan albums ("I love the early *Freewheelin'* stuff, but *Blood on the Tracks*, *Blonde on Blonde*? Impossible question!") we move onto guitars and the cherished house instrument. "I have a 1953 Gibson J-50, which to me is the pièce de résistance," he gushes. It's no wonder he's proud, considering how well regarded the beautiful spruce and mahogany dreadnoughts still are. "Yeah, I don't take that one out of the house, so for the live shows I've started playing a modern Gibson Southern Jumbo, which is another really nice piece. In terms of differences between the two, I find the vintage one quite buttery; you almost don't have to play it, because it has a life of its own. It was made the year my mother was born, so I feel it has its own story and has had its own life, so it doesn't really need me to be playing it. I sit down with it every now and again and it almost tells me a story or plays me a song. With the modern guitar, it's a beautiful sound, but it's not been worked in and hasn't had those years and years of playing, so it feels like I'm taking control a bit more. But it has a beautiful tone and I'm really looking forward to taking it out on the road."

> **"Something happens when you put words or poetry to music"**

These days Will is a Gibson player through and through, but he doesn't take that for granted; he remembers when he was taking less flash instruments with him to those open mic nights. "I used to play classical guitars for my solo sound," he explains. "What I liked about them was that I'd go to an open mic night and everyone would have a steel string guitar and I felt that they all had a similar kind of sound. So when I played those classical guitars, it set me apart a bit and made me a little different. I had a Czech guitar, a Strunal, for a while, and an Italian classical too. I played those two guitars for ages, and they were only basic, entry level gut-strung guitars, so I'm really looking forward to taking something special with me out on the road with the band for the new album tour. I started out playing steel string guitar, so now that I'm back with them, it feels a bit like coming home." ■

***Spirit of Minnie* is out now on Xtra Mile.**
Info: www.willvarley.com

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FIRST AID KIT

One of Sweden's finest exports since Abba, Klara and Johanna Söderberg's brand of twinkly country folk has won them loyal fans. But as George Henry King found out, their sound – and attitude – has had to toughen up

In October 2017, First Aid Kit celebrated their tenth year as a band, but it'll be August this year that marks perhaps their most life-changing anniversary.

After uploading a cover of Fleet Foxes' 'Tiger Mountain Peasant Song' to YouTube in 2008, Sweden's Klara and Johanna Söderberg became internationally known after the video went viral. Their notable youthfulness, yet pitch-perfect ear for a harmony oozed a level of maturity beyond their years; their crystal clear talent juxtaposing the grainy, phone-filmed footage in which they featured.

Ten years on, and the duo's early potential has unsurprisingly blossomed. Critically-acclaimed albums have come to be expected, and high-profile collaborations with the likes of Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst, REM's Peter Buck and even Fleet Foxes themselves, are often only a phone call away. But being in demand has taken its toll.

By the time First Aid Kit's touring commitments for their third LP, *Stay Gold*, had come to an end, the Swedish sisters had been on the road for around six years, and they were desperately longing for a well-deserved break. In between tours, their days off would be spent either continuously writing songs or in recording studios, painstakingly trying to finish what would go onto become critically-acclaimed albums. But their live shows suffered as a result, and the level of love and passion the pair initially had for performing had dwindled, and left them feeling as if they were on autopilot.

"It got to the point where we had to stop because we were so exhausted and we just needed some time," states Klara (vocals and guitar), the younger of the two sisters. "We just wanted to see what it was like to be in the same place for more than ten days in a row," adds Johanna (vocals, keyboards, autoharp and bass), sipping on her flat white. "Touring and living that kind of life was the only life we knew, so it was necessary to take some time off because we needed to explore who we are when we are not being First Aid Kit."

And explore is exactly what they did. Having been somewhat cut-off from reality since the ages of 16 and 18, after being picked up almost instantly by the occasionally unforgiving clutches of the music industry's teddy picker, First Aid Kit subconsciously bypassed the opportunity to grow up in the same ways that other teenagers get to. And so when the decision to "have six months off where we don't have to think about making a new record" was made, the sisters set out to make up for lost time and accomplish things they had missed out on while growing up within the bubble of their very own musical success story. Klara experienced both the joys of falling in love and the pain of reeling from heartbreak, acquired a dog named Harpo and moved to Manchester. Johanna on the other hand passed her driving test, hung out with friends and purchased an apartment. Upon reflection, the pair agree that having to grow up fast, in such a demanding and pressure-oozing environment had both positive and negative implications.

> **"When going through something, writing gives perspective"**

"What we have done is so incredible and we are so lucky to get to do it, but you're very aware of yourself when you're onstage. So, when you're a young person and you're trying to figure out who you are and everyone is watching you kind of do that, it is pretty intense," admits Klara. "But then it's also really helpful as a teenager when you go up onstage and it's like, 'Shit, people actually really like what we do.'"

Once their time off came to an end, and after overcoming a brief bout of writer's block as a result of their time away from their respective instruments and the songwriting mindset, Klara and Johanna moved across the pond to LA and started to generate ideas for what would eventually go onto become their fourth studio album, *Ruins*. After writing nine songs in just five weeks and spending their downtime driving around California listening to their favourite records, the duo took a trip to Joshua Tree, where they rented a house, drank wine and battled with the decision of whether or not to summon evil demons.

"I'd started Googling and reading about the Ouija Board," explains Klara. "And I got really freaked out. I like to think that I am a rational person who doesn't believe in magic, but when you're out in the desert and it's super quiet, there is a storm and you're in this weird house with this Ouija Board you're like, if there are evil demons and I could summon one right now, would I really want to do that? Probably not'. So we wrote a song instead."

The song they composed ended up being one of 18 songs that the band eventually headed into the studio with. Having decided that it was important to not rush the process of this record, First Aid Kit allowed themselves to spend more time on the production side of the album than they had on any of its predecessors – despite fearing that people may have forgotten about them, given the lengthy period in which they hadn't released new material. And that wasn't the only sign of the duo starting to flex their ever-growing, music-making muscles.

After Klara instigated a personal conversation with long-time collaborator and producer Mike Mogis about the band's desire to push past the boundaries of the comfort zone in which they had existed for their previous three records, American producer Tucker Martine was hired to man the mixing desk and satisfy the band's yearning for a "less-polished" and "more raw" sounding

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record. Once the decision had been made, in order to help emulate the group's live sound and "make the listener feel as if they were in room" when they recorded the album, Klara and Johanna entrusted Tucker to put together a full live band – something Johanna was initially sceptical about.

"I think on the previous records we have played a lot of the instruments ourselves, but this time we kind of let it go a bit more," she explains. "That was a little hard to do, but they [the band] just knew what we wanted. I was definitely a little worried about how it was going to go, but they just nailed it. We just kind of left them to improvise and we didn't give them too many instructions, but they were incredible."

As a result of Klara's experience with heartbreak prior to the initial writing process for *Ruins*, when compared to First Aid Kit's last two, more commercial sounding LP's *Stay Gold* (2012) and *Lion's Roar* (2014), *Ruins* is instantly more definable due to its darker lyrical content and occasional scowling soundscape. And although the pair didn't set out to consciously write a break-up record when they first started gathering songs for their latest release, naturally Klara's emotions bled into both the music and the lyrics.

"We don't have a concept before writing. But I can say now that it does feel like a break-up record and I think that's the theme on this record. When you're going through something, writing helps you to get so much perspective on things," says Klara, candidly. "It is really hard to be in a relationship when you're a musician," adds Johanna.

"There's no 'My Silver Lining' or 'Emmylou' on this record"

As well as having to deal with the demise of a long-term relationship, both Klara and Johanna also had something else to contend with when readying themselves to write *Ruins*: the unspoken pressure of writing a record that would be equally as successful, if not more successful, than their critically acclaimed previous three releases. Their 2010 debut album, *The Big Black and the Blue* may have failed in making much of a commercial impact when it was released back in 2010, but *Lion's Roar* and the orchestral, three minute symphonies of *Stay Gold* have since picked up the slack and have collectively sold over 200,000 copies in the UK alone. But as First Aid Kit advise me, not every album can be a masterpiece.

"I am super proud of this record and I think it's a great follow-up to Stay Gold," says Johanna, as Klara nods in agreement. "People's expectations are higher, but there's no 'My Silver Lining' or 'Emmylou' on this record and we are not going to write those songs again. We try to see our career as a long-term thing and we are going to make lots of records and each one of them can't be a masterpiece. I'm not comparing us to Bob Dylan or Paul Simon, but they made so many records and they are not all masterpieces and that's okay. Basically what we are saying is, we are the new Bob Dylan," jokes Johanna, before the pair burst into laughter.

Earlier last year, First Aid Kit released a one-off single entitled, 'You Are The Problem Here' on International Women's Day. The track was written after both Klara and Johanna were inspired and angered by the lenient sentencing of a convicted rapist, and since its release, the track has become an

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GEARBOX

"We were in Nashville in this guitar shop called Carter Vintage Guitars and I saw this guitar and I was just drooling because it was the most beautiful guitar I'd ever seen. It was a Gibson from 1928 and I think there was just one made. I loved it so much, but I couldn't afford it and I almost cried because I needed that guitar in my life," says Klara before Johanna takes over the story. "So, I posted a photo of me with it on Instagram saying 'We want this guitar, but can't afford it.' Then we met up with Jack White for dinner, because we had toured with him and he was just like, 'So girls, I have something for you,' and then he came in with two instruments that we instantly recognised. It was the guitar and he also bought me a Gibson Mandolin from the 1920s that matches Klara's guitar. They are like museum pieces!"

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anti-sexual assault anthem – echoing the views of many and educating those whose opinions may have not previously aligned with those expressed in the song.

Prior to its departure from band to audience, however, First Aid Kit debated at great length about whether or not to actually release it, due to its lyrical content, punk and angst-driven sound and because surprisingly, there aren't many other songs that have been released that actually address such a sensitive issue in such an transparent way.

"It's pretty straightforward and it's not like we're saying something outlandish. It's just like, raping women is wrong. Don't do it. Don't rape women. It should be obvious and it should not be something that we're talking about, but we are and so there needs to be change."

After releasing the song, the duo admit that they were fearful of the possible repercussions – but thankfully the track was received positively; instead it was the band's political stance that in fact led the duo to being on the receiving end of a barrage of frightening comments. On the night of the US Presidential election, First Aid Kit used their vastly followed social media platforms to write a post in support of Hillary Clinton, in which they urged their fans to "do the right thing and vote for her" – much to the dismay of First Aid Kit's Trump-supporting fans. "We got rape threats from that," Johanna admits. "And some really horrible, patronising comments."

"A lot of women come to our shows and so I'd rather say, 'This is what we stand for'. It feels so great to talk about these issues"

"So many of our listeners were Trump supporters," adds Klara. "But we have a lot of women come to our shows and so I'd rather say, 'This is what we stand for'. It feels so great to talk about these issues and give them a voice."

In light of the recent revelations that have come out of Hollywood, I ask First Aid Kit if such behavior also exists within the music industry and if so, to what extent does it exist. Somewhat unsurprisingly, and sadly, my assumptions are confirmed.

"For sure – it's a boys club," Johanna instantly replies, before enlightening me to the time an undisclosed record label suggested making First Aid Kit's early album "sexy," despite the fact that Klara was only 14 at the time.

"Now when I look back at it I think it's so crazy," admits Klara upon reflection. "It's hard, and as a woman, people are going to comment about the way you look and you become aware of that and in some ways I wish I could just go 'fuck it, I'm not going to put makeup on.'"

It is also an uphill battle, in recent years, for female musicians and bands to gain exposure in the mainstream media and invites to perform at popular music events. Major music festivals such as Reading and

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Leeds Festival, for example, have been criticised recently at great lengths for their male-dominated line-ups and First Aid Kit insist it's time for change.

"In Sweden, festivals are deliberately started to make it 50/50, men and women. Sweden has a lot of issues, but when it comes to feminism I think we are in a good place. There are big female artists about today, but they don't get the attention they deserve. Like, put a women on the cover of MOJO! Is it really that hard?" asks Johanna.

"If the media give men more attention," Klara adds, "then women aren't going to do as well. So it's not just the [festival] promoters – it's everything."

When growing up, Klara and Johanna were frequently encouraged to be creative by their parents. Their father was part of a popular Swedish rock band up until Johanna was born, and their mother taught cinematography. They were never forced to pursue music, but naturally the draw of music was too enticing to resist and the pair were eager singers even from an early age – often performing their own concerts using a skipping rope for a microphone.

They credit Sweden's schools for their encouraging attitude to teaching music in educational institutions, but given the UK government's constant slashing of Arts funding, how damaging could such cuts be to the creative freedom and development of our young, budding musicians?

"It's really damaging because children need to play music and school is so formulaic," Klara replies. "You have to be good at maths, but I was never good at maths and I never will be, but I had music and writing and I was good at that. I feel like it's such a great way to express yourself and kids need that – it's such a great outlet to express your emotions."

> **"Every song we write has to sound great on just guitar and vocals"**

Guitarist and vocalist Klara first started to learn the guitar at the age of 13, after their dad purchased her a £40 Spanish guitar. Although her dad initially "didn't think I would stick with it", she tells me that to this day she still plays it live and even writes songs with it, but her go-to instrument currently is a Martin 00-DB Jeff Tweedy signature model. Clearly the importance of the acoustic still holds a place in the hearts of First Aid Kit . And Johanna can't stress enough how important and powerful the simplicity of an acoustic accompanied by merely a vocal is.

"The song has to be so strong and stand on its own without the production and it has to tell a story, whereas today all the songs are just mass-produced crap. On the radio all the songs just sound the same and I think people are just longing for a connection with something that has more of a real human emotion behind it where you can tell who is the messenger and who wrote it and we always have to have that – every single song we write has to sound great on just guitar and vocals. If it doesn't, then it's not ready."

Just before First Aid Kit's PR brings our conversation to an end, I wonder what the next ten years will bring for First Aid Kit.

"We want to do things in a sustainable way. We want to try different genres and release a Christmas album," says Johanna. I couldn't think of a better Christmas present. ■

First Aid Kit's new album, *Ruins* is out now via Columbia Records.
Info: www.firstaidkitband.com

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INSIDE COLLECTION
PAUL BRETT

Each month, vintage guitar expert and star Paul Brett shows us his formidable collection. This month, a harp, a Guild and the Kay which launched his career

EGAN HARP

On the hunt for new instruments, occasionally I come across something quite outside of my sphere. I look in the strangest of places to find rarities and mostly come up empty handed. A few months ago while browsing an antique dealer's site, though, something came up that made me jump straight in the car and head to the dealers showroom. This dealer rarely keeps musical instruments but this thing looked like a Celtic style harp. It was an attractive piece in very good condition, with little information regarding provenance. I just had a gut feeling that it might be something rather special so I took a chance and purchased it at what seemed a very reasonable price.

When I got it home I took photos of it, including the two numbers stamped on its base. One looked like a storage number, the other like a museum or collection reference number. I sent about a dozen photos to the long-established Morley Harps company in London, asking for their opinion as to the maker and origin. I suspected it was Irish because of the shamrocks in gold that adorned much of the body. And yes, Morley confirmed that it was indeed an Irish travelling harp made by the legendary John Egan in Dublin in the early 1800s. In fact, Morley said one of the numbers stamped on the base was one of their repair numbers from the turn of the 1900s.

A few weeks later, I had dinner with guitarist Clive Carroll and his wife Lily Neil, who is one of the foremost Celtic harpists in the world and she actually did a study on Egan harps at university. Lily also confirmed that it was an extremely rare item and was very enthusiastic about my find. As it turns out, these early travelling harps are extremely rare and another lucky person in New York found one discarded in a dumpster. The *New York Times* ran the story with the headline 'Priceless Irish Harp Found In Dumpster'. Well I don't know about priceless, but the one I have is in far better condition than the one found in the dumpster and certainly worth a good deal more than I paid for it, especially with confirmation of provenance. I shall for the time being just enjoy having it in my collection, as I may never find another.

GUILD F-212

I've mentioned in earlier columns that I learned basic blues 12-string picking from Johnny Joyce. John's chosen guitar throughout most of his playing career was a 1960s Guild F-212. This model is revered as one of the best 12-strings made, with players including American superstars Paul Simon and John Denver.

The first Guild guitars were produced in 1953 in New York, so as guitar companies go, they were fairly new kids on the block compared to Martin and Gibson. The 60s F-212s were made at their Hoboken factory and had two internal truss rods running inside the neck. Later models reverted to one in the 70s. Johnny used La Bella medium gauge silk and steel strings with his Guild and tuned way down to B, which gave him a really deep, bluesy sound that perfectly added a musical tapestry to his traditional blues vocals and instrumentals. One of my favourite acoustic strummers of all time, Richie Havens, played a Guild D-40 six-string. I recommend wholeheartedly that you watch his videos and learn how to deliver exciting live performances plus add original arrangements to classic songs.

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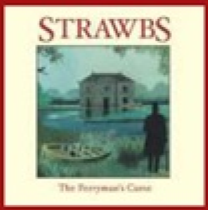
'CRYSTALLINE' KAY 12-STRING

Back in the early 1970s, I switched from six-string electric and acoustic guitars to a 12-string. I had learned some basic picking blues styles from British blues 12-string pioneer, Johnny Joyce. But having caught the bug, I wanted to develop my own style. I strolled into Woolworth's one day in Fulham and spotted a Kay 12-string for sale with an asking price of £40 with a solid case. I spent about a year experimenting with techniques and genres and came up with an original style which journalist Fred Della termed 'Orchestral Solo 12-string'.

The 70s were interesting times as they heralded the birth of punk. Spiky-haired youths dressed in dustbin bags really shook up music at that time and forced a new, if somewhat violent genre of music to emerge and fashion to go with it. I'd spent most of the 60s and early 70s playing in and recording with, rock and pop groups and by then I was looking for a new way to keep my interest in guitar playing alive. I was too old for punk – only just! So I took the risk of making a solo acoustic 12-string album that my friend Ralph Steadman kindly produced. With every major record company falling over themselves to sign a punk band, I pressed 1,000 copies of the album which I called *Earth Birth* (the first suite for 12-string guitar) and released it on my own label called Phoenix Future. I sent out review copies to all the main publications and was extremely surprised to receive amazing reviews. So much so that all the album copies sold within a few weeks and RCA Records (now BMG) gave me a four-year contract with an album per year with worldwide releases. This was all down to a whim I had to compose an original work for solo 12-string on a £40 Woolies cheapo guitar! Plus, it flew in the face of the current punk trend.

It does pay through the course of life to go out on a limb and try different things; occasionally some of them will stick. To this day, I have no idea what happened to that Kay 12-string, but I still have the blue hard case with stripes it came with. Despite looking for a similar guitar, I could never find one. However, much later I did source a Kay solid wood, professional 12-string which sounds fabulous.



ON THE RECORD
THE STRAWBS, *THE FERRYMAN'S CURSE*

It's fair to say that Paul Brett and legendary UK folk band, The Strawbs have history. Having played on the same circuit around London pubs in the late 60s, it was the Strawbs main songwriter, Dave Cousins himself, who booked Paul for the first time at the historic White Bear pub sessions in Hounslow. Paul was later to play lead guitar on 'The Vision of the Lady of the Lake' from *Dragonfly*, an album that Tony Visconti has described as one of his favourite ever albums to produce.

This issue, Paul talks us through his top picks from the first album by the band in eight years, *The Ferryman's Curse*.

'THE NAILS FROM THE HANDS OF CHRIST'

"Opens with fluid instrumental tapestries into Dave Cousin's distinctive vocal. Great lyrics, playing and arrangement and overall a very powerful opening track. All the lads are performing their respective roles well. Tight arrangement, emotive, with fluid and sympathetic keyboards."

'THE FAMILIARITY OF OLD LOVERS'

"Spanish guitar opening and another deeply sensitive vocal performance by DC. His work on this album is probably, in my humble opinion, his best recorded vocal offering to date."

'THE FERRYMAN'S CURSE'

"Powerful and atmospheric mood here that morphs into solo acoustic guitar as an intro to more Dave Cousins' close mic vocals, sensitive lyrics that flow into electric guitar passages as the track builds into a more strident vocal delivery that has become his trademark through the years. Pure Strawbs."

"In short, a new album of lyrical genius accompanied by brilliant playing and arrangements, moulded together by the production skills of Chris Tsangarides. For me, this is the best Strawbs album to date (sorry Tony). The difference is the addition of Dave Bainbridge: while he has some hard acts to follow in that role, there's a magic glue he conjures that suits the band to perfection. 15 out of 10. Go listen for yourselves!"

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TRIO

SPRING TOUR 2018

UK AND IRELAND

27 Feb	Yardbird Arts Club, Worcestershire
28 Feb	Pershore Jazz Club, Worcestershire
2 Mar	The Leftbank Village, Hereford
3 Mar	Upper Sapey Village Hall, Worcestershire
6 Mar	Llangollen Pavilion, Denbighshire
7 Mar	Plas Glyn-y-Weddw, Llanbedrog, Gwynedd
9 Mar	Habberley Village Hall, Shropshire
15 Mar	CICCIC, Taunton
16 Mar	Caffe Vista, Tenby
17 Mar	Theatr Gwaun, Fishguard
18 Mar	Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon
22 Mar	The Bristol Fringe, Bristol
23 Mar	Stroud Valleys Artspace, Stroud
24 Mar	The Pound, Corsham, Wiltshire
5 Apr	Grey Village Hall, Sutton-On-Forest, North Yorkshire
6 Apr	Newton Le Willows Village Hall, Bedale, North Yorkshire
7 Apr	Kilburn Village Institute, Kilburn, North Yorkshire
11 Apr	Swansea Jazzland, Swansea
14 Apr	Centre for Alternative Technology, Pantperthog, Machynlleth
18 Apr	Stop Cafe, Shrewsbury
20 Apr	Pizza Express, Birmingham
21 Apr	Thornbury Arts Festival, Gloucestershire
26 Apr	The Fisher Theatre, Bungay, Suffolk
27 Apr	The Quay Theatre, Sudbury, Suffolk
28 Apr	The Fold, Billericay, Essex
29 Apr	Pizza Express Jazz Club, London
2 May	Newcastle Arts Centre, Newcastle
3 May	The Old Fire Station, Carlisle
4 May	Harbour Arts, Irvine, North Ayrshire
10 May	Caroline Social Club, Shipley, West Yorkshire
11 May	Castle Park Arts Centre, Frodsham, Cheshire
12 May	Chilwell Arts Theatre, Beeston, Nottinghamshire
16 May	The George Hotel, Lichfield
17 May	Ludlow Brewery, Shropshire
18 May	Weobley Village Hall, Herefordshire
19 May	Ledbury Market Theatre, Herefordshire
24 May	Komedia, Brighton
25 May	The Spring Arts & Heritage Centre, Havant, Hampshire
26 May	Forest Arts Centre, New Milton, Hampshire
29 May	Balor Arts Centre, Ballybofey, Co. Donegal, Ireland
30 May	Linenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar, Co. Mayo, Ireland
31 May	Wexford Arts Centre, Wexford, Ireland
1 Jun	Courthouse Arts Centre, Tinahely Co. Wicklow, Ireland
2 Jun	The Séamus Ennis Arts Centre, Naul Co. Dublin, Ireland

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GIBSON MONTANA J-45 STANDARD & J-45 WALNUT BURST AG

Will these Montana variants keep the J-45 workhorse legend alive? Joel McIver finds out

Sometimes you're given the opportunity to play a guitar that you know will be a gobsmacker right out of the box. These two splendidly expensive Gibsons – Standard and Avant-Garde variants for 2018 of the J-45 Montana series – look ravishing before we even pick them up, let alone apply pick to string. In fact, if you're not careful, these guitars will warp your brain a bit.

There's a certain psychological weight emanating from these instruments that would lead many a weak-willed reviewer to declare them winners without bothering to put them through their paces properly... so let's put on a stern face and assume nothing about them whatsoever. After all, while the immense heritage of these two instruments is undeniable, their cost is wallet-threateningly steep, coming in at the thick end of four grand between them.

We wouldn't be serving you or the guitars themselves justly if we allowed ourselves to be swayed by mind-blowing facts such as 'Gibson have been making J-45s since 1942', so let's ask the question; what are you really getting for your money, apart from a nice logo and the Bozeman, Montana build origin?

BUILD QUALITY

The round-shouldered Montana J-45 Standard and the single-cutaway J-45 Walnut Burst differ in their timbers and their electronics, and the former is £400 more expensive than the latter, so to an extent it's unfair to compare them like for like. That being understood, they share a similar playing feel and build quality – as well as traditional features such as the 24.75" scale length; a 20-fret neck, of which 14 frets are accessible; jack inputs via the rear strap button; and familiar bridges and tuners.

Straight out of the supplied case, a suitably muscular Gibson hardshell box, both guitars feel genuinely marvellous. The finish in both cases feels super-durable, but it's also aesthetically pleasing, maximising the visual impact of the woods. The scratchplates have a slight three-dimensional profile, as if a pool of treacle has been allowed to congeal on the bodies, and the necks feel as perfectly sleek and secure as you'd expect, indeed demand, at this price point.

As always with expensive guitars, it's the small details that you're paying for in addition to the big picture. We're relieved to report that the Grover tuners turn firmly, the fret ends are buffed perfectly and the tiny plastic controls inside the soundhole – so often a cheap and fragile feature – feel tough enough to withstand the fumblings of the most sausage-fingered guitarist.

The action on the models we've been sent is pleasantly low, but not so much that you feel unable to get 'under' the strings, and the neck profile is shallow and playable. The instruments balance well, with almost identical weights, with the only real difference in feel coming from the cutaway on the Avant Garde model. These are not guitars which try to shove their quality in your face; instead, you sense that much of what you're paying for is not visible to the naked eye, such as the hand-scalloped bracing in the body, and indeed, a century of guitar-making expertise.

SOUND QUALITY

Dig into the Montana J-45 Standard and you'll recognise its familiar tones; the sitka spruce top and mahogany sides and back combine for a sound that has been at front and centre in acoustic world for decades. What is surprising is the phenomenal

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GIBSON MONTANA J-45 STANDARD

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Gibson
Model: Montana J-45 Standard
RRP: £2,099
Body Size: J-45
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Max Rim Depth: 4.8" (117 mm)
Max Body Width: 16" (41 mm)
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20 (14 accessible)
Bridge: Traditional, rosewood
Nut Width: 1.725" (44 mm)
Scale Length: 24.75" (629 mm)
Weight: 4.6lbs (2.1 kg)
Onboard Electrics: LR Baggs VTC Active Pickup System
Controls: Volume and tone
Tuners: Grover Rotomatic, nickel
Left Hand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: Vintage Sunburst, Wine Red, Gold Top, Pelham Blue
Gig Bag/Case Included: Gibson hardshell case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Incredible playability; heritage oozes from this instrument
Cons: Hefty pricetag
Overall: An acoustic guitar that should be at the top of everyone's wish list

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪✪

GIBSON MONTANA J-45 WALNUT BURST AVANT GARDE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Gibson
Model: Montana J-45 Walnut Burst Avant Garde
RRP: £1,699
Body Size: J-45, single cutaway
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Walnut
Max Rim Depth: 4.1" (104mm)
Max Body Width: 16" (41mm)
Neck: Maple
Fingerboard: Walnut
Frets: 20 (14 accessible)
Bridge: Walnut
Nut Width: 1.687" (43mm)
Scale Length: 24.75" (629mm)
Weight: 4.3lbs (1.96kg)
Onboard Electrics: LR Baggs Element pickup
Controls: Volume
Tuners: Mini Grover
Left Hand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: Walnut Burst
Gig Bag/Case Included: Gibson hardshell case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Tone range, access to upper frets
Cons: None
Overall: A costly but eminently practical performing instrument, built for the live stage

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

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volume and sustain, as well as the speaking clarity of each string; maximise this by flat-picking in the upper registers and you'll love the sheer presence of those high notes. Depth, a clearly-enunciated voice and string separation are all there, with even volume across the neck and a shimmering projection that rapidly illustrates why it is that generally sane people invest as much as a second-hand Mondeo in instruments like this.

Plug the Standard J-45 in, and its LR Baggs pickup – an active system with volume and tone controls – brings the instrument's tone to life. Big bass notes are present and correct, while the mids are silky and the top end crystalline; don't be afraid to roll on the top end via the interior EQ control for some extra zing. You'll probably swear when you drop your pick inside the guitar; it was always going to happen with those controls located where they are.

Switch to the Avant Garde and you'll immediately notice a brighter edge to the tone, thanks to the guitar's walnut back and sides. Slung at waist height for ease of performance, the value of its lower cutaway immediately becomes clear. Thanks to that and its slightly reduced 43mm nut width, this instrument begs to be played hard – so we duly obliged, but only for a few minutes,

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aware of the eye-watering pricetag and the potential impact of a bill from Gibson HQ.

With either guitar, the signs of quality are easily seen and felt. Barre chords are a doddle – always the first sign of a sympathetic instrument – and the deep, cutting tone of individual strings can't be denied. Dump the pick, switch to fingers and perhaps experiment with an alternate tuning and you'll find a warmer tone, especially useful in the case of the brighter-toned Avant Garde.

It's the instruments' enthusiastic response which is most gratifying; even plucked high up, the strings don't 'choke' or lose significant sustain, presumably the results of that lovely interior bracing and the tonewood combination.

Although these are expensive instruments, as we keep repeating, they're also practical in design. Evidently strong enough to survive the rigours of the road – well, most of them, at least – and intended to fulfil an obvious need for performance and reliabilty, both guitars feel perfectly suited for their role. Studio musicians will benefit from their inherent tone range too, and if you're a common-or-garden bedroom strummer like most of us, you'll be in acoustic heaven.

CONCLUSION

With either the Standard or Avant Garde model, you're reaping the fruits of the very best guitar design and construction

> **"With either guitar, the signs of quality are easily seen and felt"**

the industry has to offer – if you're after a mass-produced guitar, that is.

A huge caveat from my admittedly cynical point of view is that you could take your £2,099 or £1,699 of taxed income, and spend it on commissioning an independent luthier to make a guitar of even greater quality than these. In doing so, you'd be investing not in a brand but in a product, and you'd also be helping keep an independent artisan in business. I'd never suggest such a thing if we were talking about a £500 guitar, of course; at that price point, mass-produced instruments by big companies who work at scale are the obvious way to go.

Then again, take another route and you wouldn't get the Gibson feel, the Gibson reputation or the Gibson after-sales service – let alone the kudos you'll get for owning a guitar with the G word on it. If those things appeal to you, and judging by the standards of these instruments they absolutely should, consider investing.

We can't possibly imagine that you'd end up regretting it; these wonderful guitars are pretty much the state of the art for 2018 and beyond. ■

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"From top to bottom, this Hummingbird creates a buzz"

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GIBSON MONTANA HUMMINGBIRD VINTAGE CHERRY SUNBURST

A fine wine depends on the vintage: Huw Hopkins learnt to appreciate new tastes in Gibson Montana's 2018 Hummingbird

Don't get me wrong, I've never doubted his ability to write a song, but I've never identified with Chris De Burgh. To me, he is the Chris Martin of the 1970s and 1980s. I can't remember him ever doing anything bad, and I even went on his Wikipedia page looking for the 'Controversies' section that most musicians have, yet nothing. He is into alternative therapies and spiritual healing, his songs are generic and bland, but he still manages to capture an audience and get thousands to sing along with him for the biggest hits – and for that, I begrudgingly respect the 'Lady in Red' singer.

And I have never identified with him more than when I opened the case to Gibson's 2018 acoustic Montana Hummingbird, as the Vintage Cherry Sunburst highlights caught my eyes. I'm more of a natural wood, or, at a push, a blonde-top kind of player, but with some brands you make an exception.

BUILD QUALITY

The mahogany merlot one-piece back is bound to the matching sides by an ivory-coloured multi-ply top-and-back trim. On its bottom is a strap lock-cum-jack plug, and at the top, the shoulders are squared off to complete the popular shape. The outside-edge red on the Sitka spruce top fades into a sunburst centre, which is adorned with a beautifully-shaped tortoise shell scratchplate. Gibson has pulled out extra stops and the plate features a painted scene of a hummingbird and butterfly pollinating flowers – sadly, I'm no horticulturist so cannot go into much more detail about what the flowers are. The traditional double ring rosette around the soundhole is a nice touch, matched by a typical Tusq saddle bridge made of rosewood.

The neck is attached to the body via a compound dovetail at the 14th fret, where a secondary strap lock is attached – a preference of mine rather than tying the strap at the headstock, as it gives much greater freedom of movement and better control of the fretboard. It is made of mahogany that tapers slightly toward the head. Supporting it is a single action truss rod, and on top sits a rosewood fretboard nearly 25" in length. The mother-of-pearl parallelograms indicating neck positions are nicely crafted to match the space between the respective nickel alloy frets, which are matched by dots on the side of the neck. There are also fret markers on the first fret – unnecessary, but, each to their own.

Neatly slotted in place between the fretboard and the headstock is a Tusq nut just 1.725" wide. Stretched over the top of it to a 17-degree angle are six Light Gauge Gibson strings that reach toward Grover Rotomatic tuning keys. Inlaid into the traditional CF-100 head shape is the classic mother-of-pearl Gibson logo and a crown.

From top to bottom, this Hummingbird creates a buzz. Whatever your preference in size, colour, tone and playing style, it's difficult to avoid picking this Cherry Sunburst up.

SOUND QUALITY

If you've had the pleasure of seeing the Rolling Stones play 'You Can't Always Get What You Want' live, typically Mick Jagger strolls out to the front while the choir is singing, and begins to strum a Hummingbird. So, regardless of what I say or hear from it, there is no doubting the chops this guitar has amassed. Many other members of the Stones are Gibson advocates, and the likes of Brian May, Chris Cornell and Thom Yorke have opted for the same model in recent years.

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But with the guitar's roots in rhythm and blues, Eric Clapton's 'Hey Hey' seemed an appropriate tune to learn. Clapton tended to play his acoustic sets with a Martin, but he toyed with electric Gibsons through amplifiers, so it didn't seem like heresy to play his tunes on a Gibson acoustic model – and the Hummingbird was more than up to the task.

The song is a healthy mix of flatpicked lead lines and resonant chordal notes, and neither overpowered the other. Each was rich and offered a deep tone to whatever combination you wanted. Sadly, that meant you could clearly hear it when you hit

GIBSON MONTANA HUMMINGBIRD VINTAGE CHERRY SUNBURST

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Gibson
Model: Montana Hummingbird Cherry Sunburst
RRP: £2,099
Body Size: Square shouldered dreadnought
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Bridge: Rosewood
Nut Width: 1.725" (43.8mm)
Scale Length: 24.75" (628.7mm)
Onboard Electrics: LR Baggs Element VTC
Controls: Volume, tone
Tuners: Grover Rotomatic
Left Hand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: Vintage Cherry Sunburst
Gig Bag/Case Included: Gibson Hardshell

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Structurally and sonically it is close to being a faultless guitar
Cons: The colour might not be to everyone's taste, but it grows on you
Overall: Gibson has boatloads of expertise built into a stalwart of the guitar world to breathe fresh life into the Hummingbird

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality:
Sound Quality:
Overall:

CONTACT DETAILS

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duff notes, but it's such a simple guitar to play that it's rare to ever feel like you're incapable of striking the right chord – especially on a neck that's just 12" in radius.

With a lead plugged into the bottom and hooking up with a mini acoustic amp, the Vintage Hummingbird really shone. The electrical LR Baggs Element VTC on the guitar is so neat, you barely realise it's there. There is no need for bulky knobs or switches on the outside of the body, as the undersaddle pickup volume and tone controls are discreetly tucked into the edge of the soundhole as you look at someone playing the guitar. Beyond the hidden aspect of them – you'll just think they are a structural element of the guitar from any seat in the audience – they are positioned so you can easily adjust them mid-strum without losing rhythm.

Subtle shifts in dynamic playing are captured well to recreate an unplugged feeling, wherever you're playing. This is

> ***"There is no doubting the chops that this guitar has amassed"***

achieved because LR Baggs developed the pickups to depend on string compression, so essentially it mimics the soundboard's movement as you play. The setup is unlike many I have seen and produces one of the best sounds I've heard from an electric acoustic. Throw in the pleasure of playing such a superb guitar and it's tough to say anything bad about the Gibson Heritage Hummingbird Cherry Sunburst.

CONCLUSION

While it may not be my cup of tea to look at initially, as I was packing the guitar away into its hardshell case with a blue fabric interior, I was reluctant to send it back to Bozeman, Montana, USA – it never looked so lovely. Maybe Chris de Burgh was right. This lady in red was dancing with me, and even in a mag where some of my fellow reviewers are testing some of Gibson's other world-beating guitars, if they gave me half a chance, I'd still pick this one, Cherry Sunburst and all. ■

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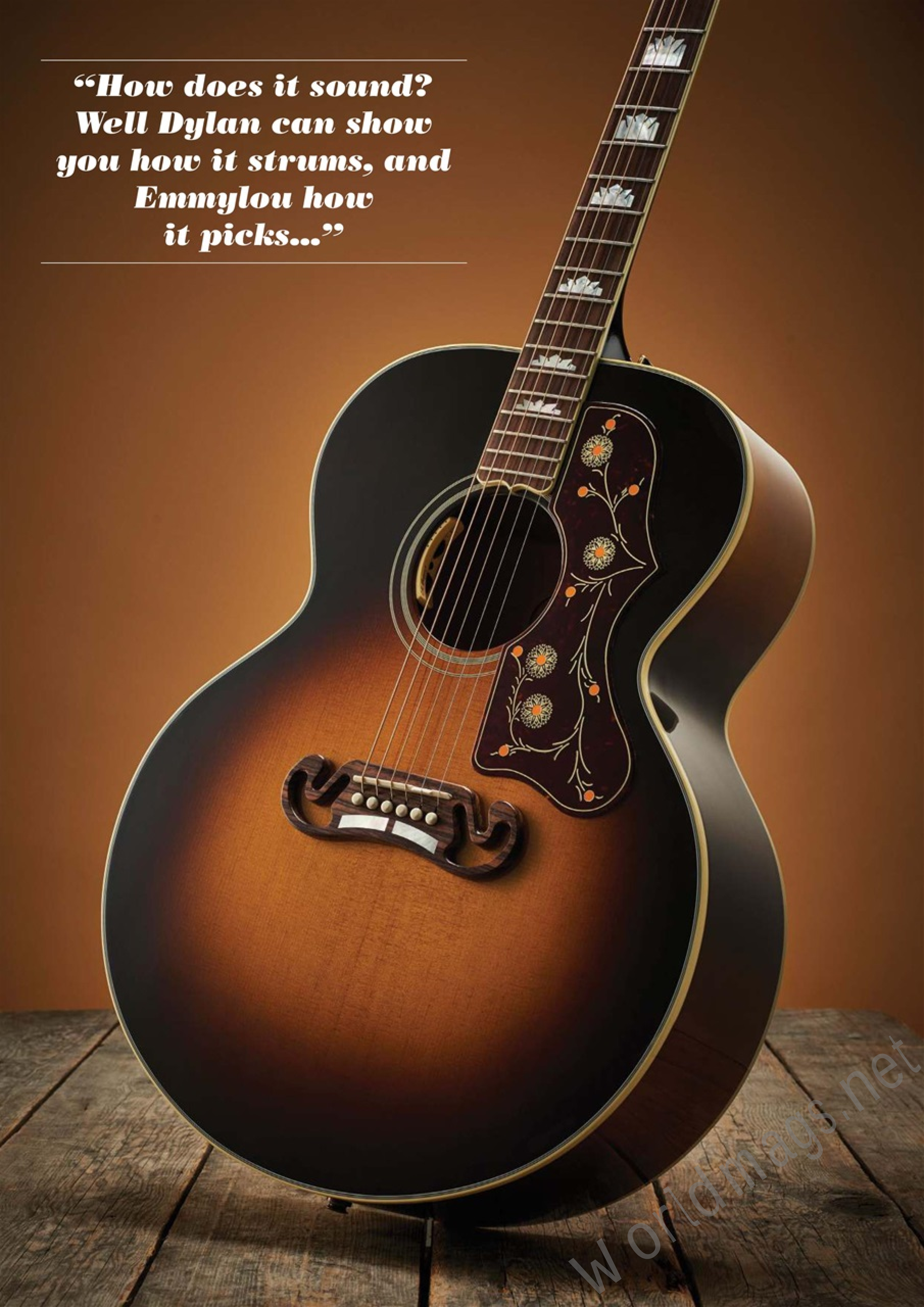
"How does it sound? Well Dylan can show you how it strums, and Emmylou how it picks..."



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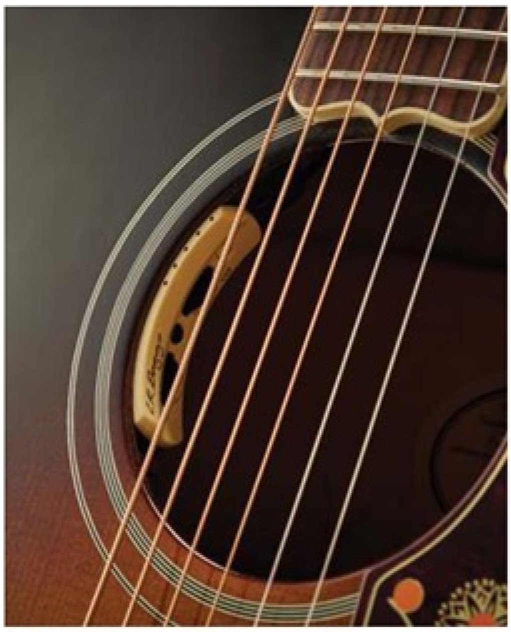
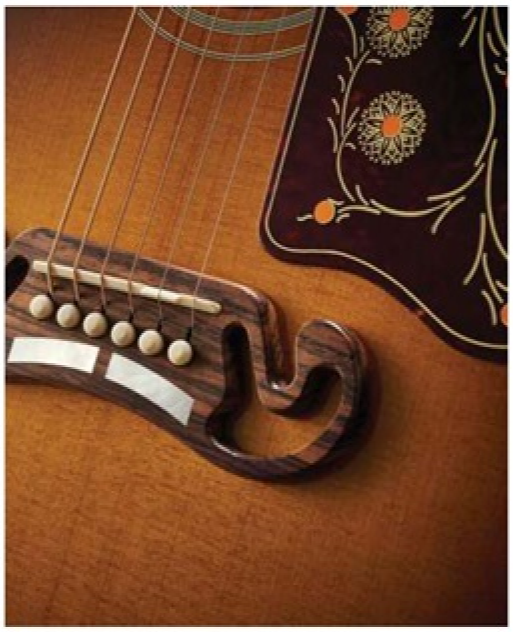
GIBSON MONTANA SJ 200 STANDARD

Andy Pritchard mixes with royalty, but is it still in touch with its subjects?





There are some words that have become so overused these days that their meanings are hardly recognisable. In the guitar world such a word would be iconic, overused by marketeers in an effort to imbue hidden value into some middle of the road retro product... but here, here we have a truly iconic guitar.

Elvis had one with his name inlaid on the fretboard and with a tooled leather cover custom made by his friend Charles Underwood. Dylan clutched one, smiling no less, on his classic 1969 album, *Nashville Skyline*, and Emmylou Harris, in a similar happy state, sat dwarfed by one that Gram Parsons had given her on the cover of her 1987 album, *Angel Band*. So it is with some trepidation that I come to review this, the current incarnation of the SJ 200. In fact if you want to get a good impression of how it sounds? Well Dylan can show you how it strums, Emmylou how it picks, and if you are in need of anger management therapy, listen to Pete Townshend thrashing nine bells out of his one on 'Pinball Wizard'. You might also want to take in George Harrison's 'Here Comes the Sun' or anything by the Everly Brothers, the list is endless. It made its first appearance in the 1938 Gibson catalogue, the 200 designation coming from its price tag of $200, a fortune back then. For an extra $50 you could have had your name inlaid in the fretboard. The current catalogue advises us that SJ 200 models remain "reassuringly expensive today".

BUILD QUALITY

Still, let's move on and open the box as it were. Coming in a black logoed hardcase – which, pleasingly, has just four catches, all topside – my reactions when it's revealed is "Wow". Sporting one of the nicest finishes I've ever laid eyes upon, described as Vintage Sunburst, it's a lovely dark tobacco beastie, with classic design accents from the moustache bridge and engraved scratchplate. It absolutely reeks class, and boy is it big!

From the top then. The iconic, (there's that word again) Gibson headstock sits at an angle of 17 degrees and has added visual definition from the cream binding. The Gibson legend and crown are in mother of pearl and the machine heads are gold-finished Grover Rotomatics with a ratio of 14:1 – nice. The black truss rod cover, again edged in cream, sits atop the Tusq nut, crowning a rosewood fingerboard with rolled edging, inlaid with the iconic (oh I've done it again) mother of pearl crown fret markers. Joining the body at the 15th fret, the board itself runs to 20 frets and is beautifully finished off, ending in a flowing double curve where it meets the soundhole. The neck itself is of two-piece maple construction with a walnut seam, joining the body in a compound dovetail joint and bears the same sunburst finish as the rest of the body.

Coming to the body itself, which in spite of its hugeness, sits quite comfortably upon your knee, we have a AAA Sitka spruce top with five-ply cream and black binding with the traditional double-ringed rosette. The large acrylic tortoiseshell scratchplate with the iconic (aaagh!) engraved floral design and the rosewood moustache bridge are the real difference makers visually, giving it a quite unmistakable presence in any company. The flamed maple back is of two-piece construction with a beautiful inlaid seam, this time with three-ply binding. Along with the sides, it continues the luscious vintage sunburst, and is finished in a thin nitrocellulose lacquer, which lets the guitar breathe.

Look inside and we find hand-scalloped X bracing to the top and all, as you would expect, is beautifully finished. In fact the build quality throughout is faultless, superb.

The electronics side of things have been entrusted to the LR Baggs Anthem system with their Tru-Mic Technology, which incorporates a condenser mic and their acclaimed Elemental pickup. The soundhole-mounted discrete preamp carries volume, phase and mix controls along with a battery test button. The battery itself is housed in a velcroed pocket attached inside the body on the neck joint. The jack socket is, as you would expect, housed in the strap button with another button being sited on the underside shoulder of the neck.

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Manufacturers, every acoustic guitar should come with two strap buttons... just saying.

SOUND QUALITY

First thing you notice when you sit down to play it is just how sweetly the neck sits in your hand and how easy it is to play. Gibson acoustics have a reputation for being great to play straight out the box and this baby is no exception. This is in part due to the PLEK procedure they use which is a vundervar machine from Germany that dresses the frets and basically does away with any fret buzz or intonation issues. With a slim neck allowing you to get your thumb over the top

GIBSON MONTANA SJ 200 STANDARD

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Gibson
Model: SJ 200 Standard
RRP: £3,999
Body Size: Super Jumbo
Made In: Montana USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Maple
Max Rim Depth: 4.6" (116mm)
Max Body Width: 16.9" (429 mm)
Neck: 2-piece maple
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Bridge: Rosewood Moustache
Nut Width: 1.7" (43.8mm)
Scale Length: 25.5" (648mm)
Weight: 5.3lb (2.4kg)
Onboard Electrics: LR Baggs Anthem
Controls: Volume, Mix, Phase
Tuners: Gotoh Rotomatic, Gold Plating
Left Hand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: Vintage Sunburst
Gig Bag/Case Included: Gibson Hardcase

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Beautiful, iconic, great balanced tone
Cons: Is it possible to be too refined?
Overall: A beautiful instrument but given what else is around, overpriced?

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: 5/5
Sound Quality: 4/5
Overall: 4/5

CONTACT DETAILS

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easily and a sweet low action, this really is lovely to play. The tone is clean and crisp with a well-defined tight low end. With such a big sound box, it would be easy to imagine the bottom end engulfing the top but everything is well balanced and refined. Give it a bit of welly and it responds with great attack, not always the case on Jumbos, but with no loss of definition. In fact if you think of the sound of the acoustic guitar on Pinball Wizard that's exactly what you get. Fingerpicking is clear, balanced and cultured, you don't have to work hard to play the SJ 200 the way it wants to be played.

Plug it in and it continues to be extremely well behaved, with the LR Baggs Anthem system providing great reproduction of the acoustic tone with subtle variations possible from the mix dial.

So there we have it, the Gibson Montana SJ 200 Standard: beautiful to look at and lovely to play with a clear balanced tone. You can understand why it has proved so popular over the years, a glamorous, reliable

"You can understand why it has proved so popular..."

workhorse, for those who can afford it... and therein might lie the only chink in its armour. From its introduction in 1938 until the late 80s, maybe even the 90s, there would have been few rivals at this level of refinement if any, but these days? With a price tag just shy of £4k, well that's a big lump of money, particularly when you think of some of the amazing guitars out there from the smaller luthiers, selling for £1,000 to £1,500 less. But then I suppose we come back to that word again, what makes something truly iconic?

When you buy the SJ 200 I guess you're not just buying the guitar, you're buying a piece of history. Just look back at all those touch points along the musical highway. Only Martin and Gibson can really claim to have been there from the start and this model, virtually unchanged since its launch, nigh on 80 years ago, always had the looks. It's still got it and it isn't going anywhere... ■

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GIBSON MONTANA PARLOR ROSEWOOD AG

Gibson's latest parlor guitar offers a big sound. But how have they achieved this? Ollie McGhie finds out

The evolution of the parlor guitar has come a long way. Once upon a time there were gut strings, double-course strings, there was little or no bracing and the tops were almost as thick as slices of bread. But the parlor has changed with the times. The body shape has evolved, the choice of woods for construction has been refined – all to maximise tone, volume and projection.

Gibson's recent release of the Montana Parlor Rosewood, as part of the Avant Garde range, offers a tantalising new direction in the course of the parlor guitar's history. This new model looks like a classic, and plays like a classic. It could be described as a teeny-tiny cut-away dreadnought, but it offers much more than that.

But what makes it Avant Garde? As I noted in a previous review of a parlor guitar (Auden's Emily Rose), parlor guitars sit neatly between classical and steel-strung instruments and are versatile enough to play standard repertoire from both instruments and beyond. This Montana Parlor feels like it comes from a new place. As Gibson spokesperson Ignacio Torres says, "We're taking inspiration from the younger consumer coming from electric guitar to the world of Gibson acoustic guitars. To do this we have included some differential specifications to make them easier and more comfortable to play, but without compromising the tone and sweet sound of every Gibson acoustic guitar."

It's a bold move to put a cutaway on a parlor guitar, and that's exactly what Gibson has done with this model. Traditionally, the body is elongated slightly to maximise volume. It's a small instrument and taking a chunk out of it isn't usually at the top of many luthiers' to-do lists. Gibson's latest model has bolder tendencies. Its body doesn't appear to have been lengthened and there's a cutaway. This guitar has 14 frets to the body and then a further seven, so it still has a good range compared to other parlor guitars, which only have 18 frets. Gibson has achieved all this without negating the quality of the sound.

"It's a bold move to put a cutaway on a parlor guitar"

The noise this parlor makes is exceptional. The parlor has a Sitka spruce top and rosewood back and sides. Fingerstyle playing produces a smooth even tone across the strings – even when moving from the top to the lower range. It has excellent projection but it is when you dig into the chordal playing and riffs that the guitar shows the most projection. It has a full-bodied sound, bright with a sharp attack, even more so with a plectrum. The sweetness of tone is hard to lose with fingerstyle playing. The mid and upper range tones are particularly strong. The action is set at the optimum distance and I experience no buzz, or unwarranted noise. The Advanced Response neck, which features a 16" radius profile, is a pleasure to navigate. My only wish is that my playing could be more faultless.

In spite of the size, the guitar feels relatively weighty. The construction is exquisite and the dovetail neck joint makes the guitar feel solid. This is no bad thing – it feels good to have something to sink your fingers into. Another 'Avant Garde' feature is the shallower depth. This means you have the feeling of being completely in command of the instrument.

The tone has a refreshing, sweet zing, making it perfect for soloists and singer-songwriters. One thing to be said about the tone is that it initially doesn't reveal much variety between playing over the soundhole, the fretboard, or even down by the bridge, where you'd think there'd be a crisper sound. With a slightly adjusted right-hand position I can find the harsher sound. This consistency of sound suits playing JS Bach perfectly and the big projection means the guitar can match your vocals for blues and country playing.

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To achieve this impressive volume and projection, Gibson has made some first-rate design decisions. Firstly, Gibson's choice of woods is a complementary mix. The speed of sound through spruce can reach 3,320 metres per second, making it an excellent transmitter of sound. Rosewood, with its straight grain, medium density and rich, dark colour is known for helping to produce a high volume of sound. When combined in this model, Gibson has made an excellent pairing.

Also, the pre-tensioned 28" radius top has traditional scalloped bracing designed for creating a balanced tone and richer mid-range. The Montana Parlor comes in at £1,799. While this isn't a budget guitar, it has a lot to offer. Compared to the similarly-priced small-bodied Martin 00-17s, the Montana Parlor boasts a sparkling, sweet sound while the Martin still has a light, clean projection. The Montana Parlor has one extra fret, a cutaway, a possibly even bigger sound and onboard electrics.

The inclusion of LR Baggs' VTC pickup system gives the Montana Parlor greater scope for performance. There are two dials tucked away beneath the soundhole – one for volume and one for tone. When plugged in, the tone takes you from the bridge to the other end, offering a good variety of tone – though somewhere in the middle produces

GIBSON MONTANA PARLOR ROSEWOOD AG

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Gibson
Model: Montana Parlor Rosewood AG
SSP: £1,799
Body Size: Parlor with a J-165 shape
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Rosewood
Max Rim Depth: 3.7" (94mm)
Max Body Width: 14.8" (376mm)
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Richlite
Frets: 14
Bridge: Modern belly down, Richlite
Nut Width: 1.73" (43.9mm)
Scale Length: 24.75" (628.7mm)
Electronics: LR Baggs Element VTC
Controls: Volume & Tone
Tuners: Mini Grover
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Nitrocellulose
Gig Bag/Case Included: Yes

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros : Cutaway, body-depth and big projection amount to a winning combo
Cons: Are the tones too sweet? More EQ control please
Overall: A solid, innovative build with tones that produce a cloying sweetness

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality ✪✪✪✪◐
Build Quality ✪✪✪✪◐
Overall ✪✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

www.gibson.com

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the best sound. On stage the sounds it makes are as impressive as many other bigger-bodied instruments. As a smaller, comparatively lighter instrument, the parlor is better for the shoulders and back too.

It's worth noting that at a lower, bedroom volume I can only hear the middle and upper range clearly so to capture the lower ranges the volume has to be pushed to hear them. A few delicate tweaks on my EQ on the amp rectify this.

The Antique finish gives the guitar a classic look and feel. The dappled vanilla grain of the Sitka spruce top contrasts well with the dark, Rosewood back and sides. The rosette has a simple circular design incorporating inlaid mother-of-pearl (which is also used for markers on the neck). The tortoise-shell pick guard has been well-shaped to reflect the curves of the guitar and follows the shape of the sound-hole for maximum efficiency of space. The bridge and fingerboard are made from Richlite. While incredibly hard, this material is actually

"With its volume it feels almost like a tiny dreadnought"

made from resin-infused paper and is a far more sustainable choice of material than most woods. This material has an 80 per cent hue of black – this softer tone emphasises the black, glossy veneer of the headstock, which comes with gold Grover Rotomatic tuning heads and Gibson's cursive logo. The reverse of the guitar reveals the long grain of the rosewood and the mirrored split sides are almost seamless.

Like on all Gibson acoustics, the nitrocellulose finish is a good choice too – it's durable, has some flexibility and doesn't produce the mellower sounds of a shellac varnish. Instead, it maintains the livelier, brighter sounds of the spruce top.

Overall Gibson has produced a fine piece of guitar luthiery. With its volume it feels almost like a tiny dreadnought, so forget lumbering around with your larger instrument – try this one for size. Bringing separate band EQ control to the electronics would make this guitar an absolute winner. ■

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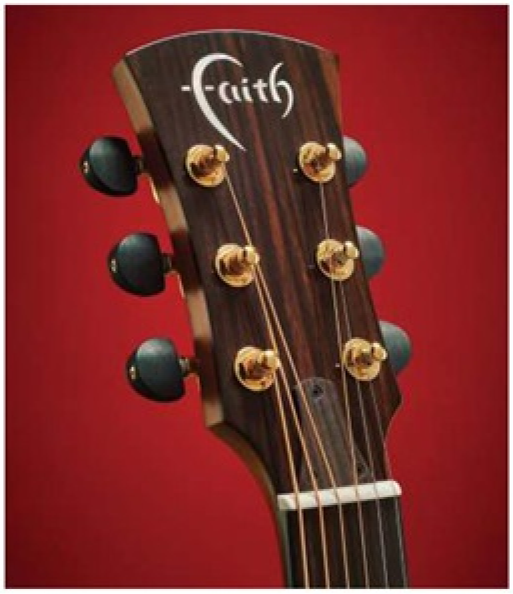
FAITH VENUS HIGLOSS VENUS CUT/ELECTRO PERCUSSIVE

A guitar designed specifically for percussive slappers and tappers? Sam Wise is intrigued



When Faith Guitars launched in 2002, you would have been forgiven for thinking Patrick James Eggle an unlikely large scale acoustic manufacturer. Not only was he best known for boutique electric guitars, Eggle's previous attempt to scale, Eggle Guitars, had ended with him falling out and leaving the business, so on two fronts, Faith seemed like, if you'll forgive the pun, a leap of faith. Sixteen years later, doubters have resoundingly been proved wrong, as Faith have gone from strength to strength and are now to be found in most guitar shops, with a very strong offering in the mid-price range. In some ways they've stuck to the knitting, keeping to fairly traditional looking guitars that won't startle the horses, but there's always been a strand of innovation and exploration to what they do. Here, they've taken their bestselling Venus model, and boldly responded to the trend towards percussive slapping and tapping in fingerstyle by adding a body sensor.

BUILD QUALITY

Early into the "design it here, build it there, set it up here" approach to building guitars abroad, Faith do things right, and the Venus Percussive is no exception. The very pale Engelmann spruce top is finely grained and wonderfully cross-silked; it certainly feels like a high-end piece of wood, and the gorgeous flame maple binding adds to the luxurious feel with lots of shimmer and lustre. The rosewood back and sides (Indonesian, we assume) is chocolatey and deliciously striped, with a beautifully bookmatched pale section in the centre of the back on our review example, bound once again in lustrous flamed maple. Faith keep the adornments simple and clean without ever sacrificing the sense of high quality and the single, simple abalone ring around the soundhole epitomises this, glittering without feeling ostentatious. The bridge and fingerboard are of ebony, and look at first glance to be stained, deep, featureless black, but on closer examination, the figuring of the ebony is visible. There's a compensated Tusq saddle, and ebony bridge pins with mother of pearl and brass inlays to continue the feeling of high end luxury. The mahogany neck has 20 frets, and the only adornment on the fingerboard is the stylised mother of pearl F at the 12th fret, leaving a mostly blank canvas of ebony right up to the Tusq nut. The headstock is faced in rosewood with an inlaid MOP Faith logo and Grover Rotomatic tuners with black buttons to tone in with the rest of the instrument. Finished in high gloss as the name suggests, the guitar is very handsome, jumping out of display racks by dint of the very pale top and spare, classy adornments, and in common with all Faith instruments, it's beautifully executed. There's nothing to find fault with, the guitar feels light and resonant, and little details like the coachlining purfling even on the sides, the rosewood heelcap and the strap button on the neck heel all give a sense of a guitar both well thought through and well executed.

The star of the show in some ways, and the thing which differentiates this from the standard Hi Gloss Venus, is the Fishman Ink body system and head unit. This pairs an undersaddle piezo with a body sensor similar to the hotspot pickups the likes of K&K make. The controls on the head unit allow you to independently control and mix the output from each pickup, which should make for a better acoustic tone full stop. The idea of targeting this at percussive players seems to come from Faith rather than from Fishman, and whether it will prove a masterstroke or instead push this guitar into a backwater of limited appeal remains to be seen.

SOUND QUALITY

As with every Faith guitar I've played, the Venus is well set up straight out of the provided hard case. The neck is a typical C shape, slim enough for speed, but not excessively tiny, and

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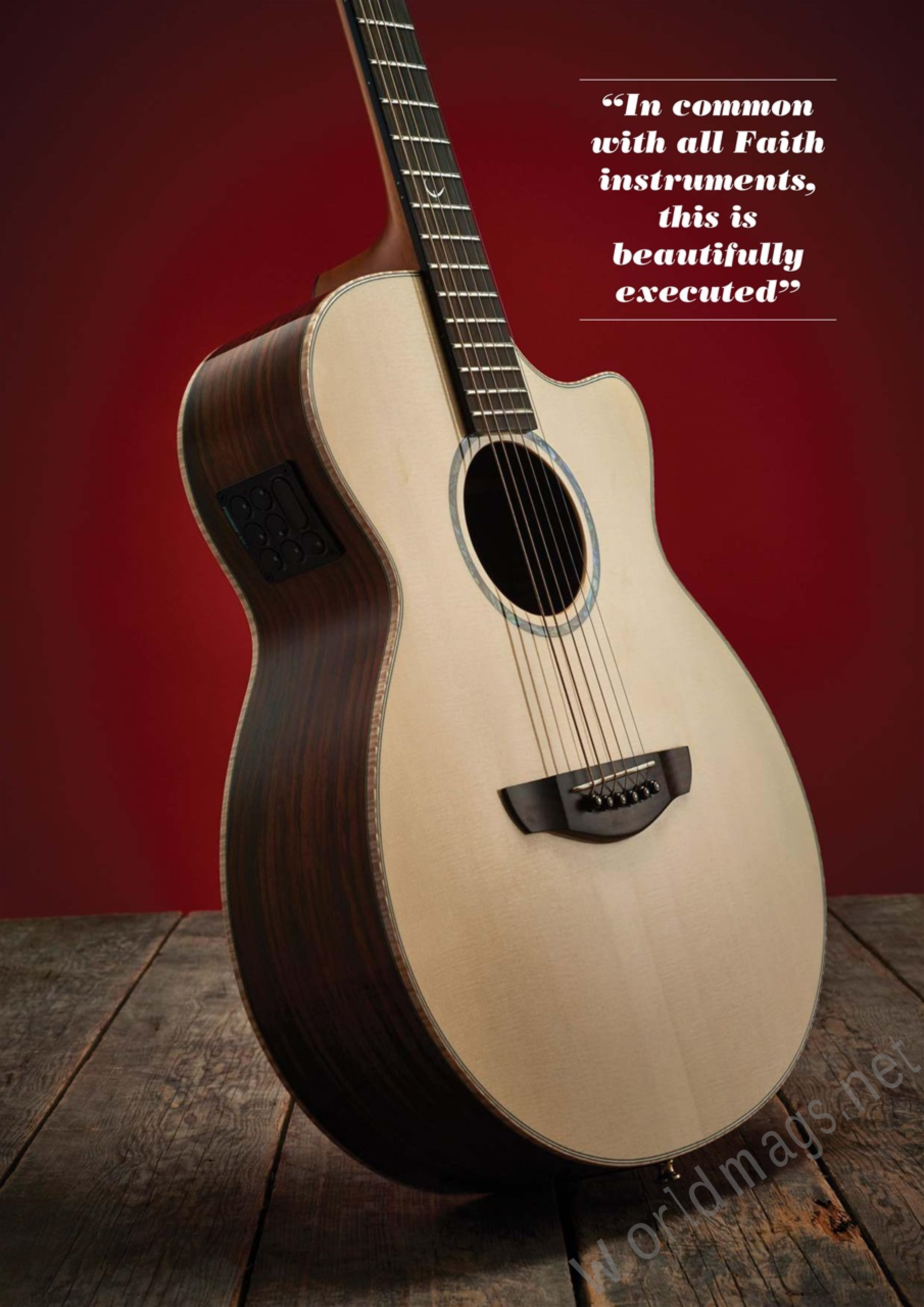

"In common with all Faith instruments, this is beautifully executed"

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satin finished for comfort. The body is a good compromise between comfort and projection, with a decent amount of soundboard, but a not-too-daunting waist for smaller players to reach around. As you would expect from spruce and rosewood, it's full toned, bright at the top, punchy at the bottom, with a little less richness in the midtones than a mahogany-bodied guitar. It's the essence of what a spruce and rosewood auditorium guitar should be; strum it hard and it punches out with confidence, pick it gently, and the crystalline treble rings clearly and prettily. Intonation is excellent across the board, and this feels a particularly balanced guitar, responding dynamically to changes in pick attack without requiring you to think too much about controlling the bass response, for example.

FAITH VENUS HIGLOSS VENUS CUT/ELECTRO

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Faith
Model: Venus HiGloss Venus Cut/Electro - Percussive
RRP: £1,049
Body Size: Auditorium
Made In: Indonesia
Top: Solid Engelmann spruce
Back and Sides: Solid rosewood
Max Rim Depth: 4.5" (114mm)
Max Body Width: 15" (381mm)
Neck: Rock maple
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Bridge: Ebony
Nut Width: 1.7" (43mm)
Scale Length: 25.5" (648mm)
Weight: 4.2lb (1.9kg)
Onboard Electrics: Fishman Ink Body
Controls: Volume, 3 band EQ, Brilliance, Notch filter, Body Control, Tuner
Tuners: Grover closed back
Left Hand Option: No (Venus High Gloss Electro without body pickup available in L/H)
Finishes Available: Natural
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Punchy tone, understated good looks, and a great pickup system
Cons: You could find a similar spec for a little less
Overall: A true do-it-all guitar. If you only have one, consider making it this

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★½
Sound Quality: ★★★★½
Overall: ★★★★½

CONTACT DETAILS

www.faithguitars.com

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Of course, this guitar is really all about the plugged-in performance, and there it doesn't disappoint either. I have the Fishman Ink system on another guitar, with the undersaddle pickup only, so I know it to be a good capable system, but this adds a further dimension. There's a large tuner display, and the expected volume and three band EQ (all the controls are inconspicuously black and flush), plus a notch filter, a brilliance control, and a separate 'body' control. If I understand the controls correctly, the main volume manages the overall output, the undersaddle pickup remains at a constant level within that, and the body control brings in more of the body sensor. Starting with the body control down low, you get what you would expect from a decent undersaddle unit; it's not perfect, but the tone reflects the acoustic sound fairly well, and with a little EQ tweaking, you can get what you want. There's a little piezo quack, but not too much, and then, as you dial in the body pickup, you get a slightly more rounded sound; the quack dies down a little, and you get a tone which, if not a perfect reflection of the acoustic tone, has a slightly more 3D feel to it. As far as the percussive stuff, the body pickup certainly seems to capture in particular

"This is an excellent all-round performer's guitar"

open-handed slaps on the soundboard better than the undersaddle unit. The ability to control body response certainly helped to get the overall volume up without causing feedback, and to balance the tone between the percussion and the strings. Overall, it's a pretty useful tool.

CONCLUSION

This is an excellent all round performer's guitar, with or without the body sensor. It's a great deal at just over £1,000, and competes with Taylors that are significantly dearer. Great for your front room, and a reliable partner when you plug it in. The Ink Body pickup is a great selling point whether you play percussive guitar or not, and my slight fear is that by aiming at that limited but growing market, Faith will stop other players looking at this guitar. It is great for percussive playing, but it's far more than that, and if you're looking for an auditorium size guitar for live work, you should try one of these even if you never slap or tap at all. ■

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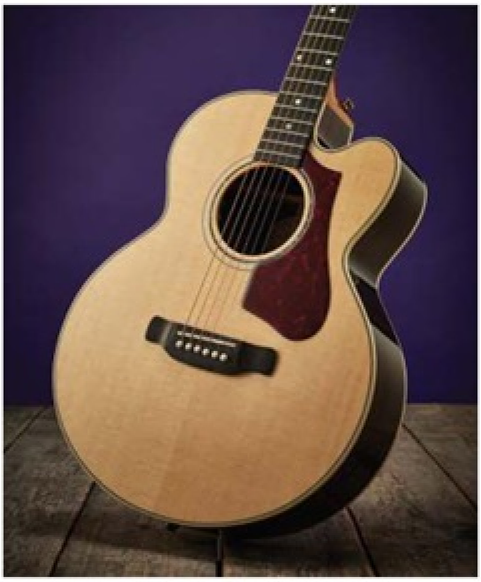

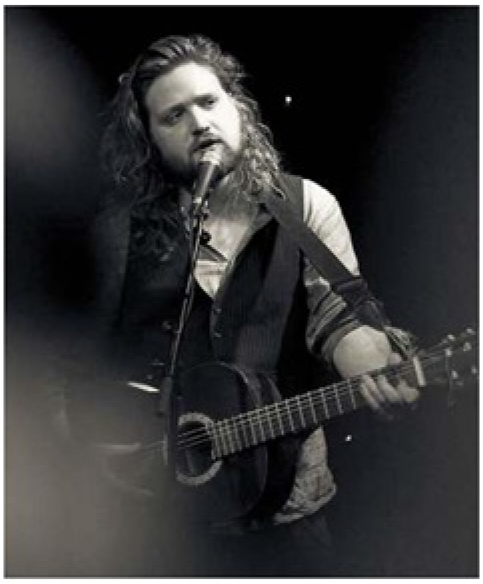
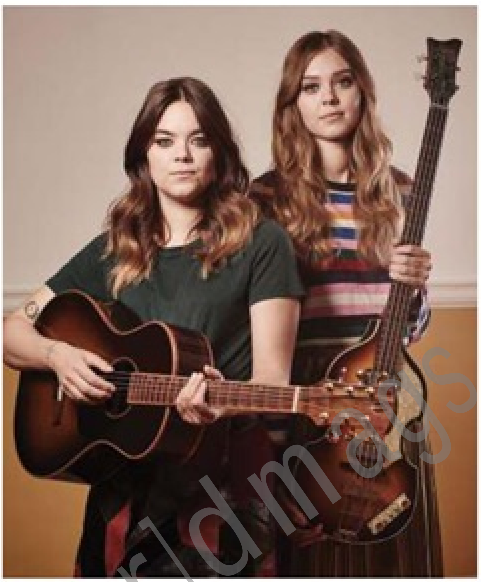

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PEPE ROMERO

Raised on Spanish guitar, Pepe Romero is known for his traditional classical guitars. We chat to the renowned luthier about his impeccable skills

WORDS: EMILY BIELBY

Pepe Romero has loved the guitar since childhood and with his parents, uncles, grandfather and cousins pretty much counting as guitar royalty, it's no wonder a young Pepe had the desire to learn himself. "I grew up with guitars all over the place, I can't actually remember the first time I picked one up but I've seen pictures of me in diapers playing the guitar and I also remember sitting in my father's lap playing guitar as well. My parents were great at encouraging me to play without making me afraid of hurting the guitar; they taught me how to hold the instrument and respect it but play it without fear and with feeling," says Pepe.

"The first guitar that was ever given to me was an inexpensive Chinese instrument, which must've been a half size guitar; it played OK and while I was still in diapers playing around, it was probably the most appropriate instrument that wasn't so fragile. When I was six or seven years old, legendary luthier and family friend, Manuel Contreras Senior gave me a small guitar and wrote a beautiful dedication in the label; he wanted that guitar to inspire me to become as great a guitar player as the rest of my family.

"I never got there, but I did love that little guitar which I no longer have. This was the guitar that I played until I was about 15 years old when my father gave me the same Miguel Rodriguez guitar that was given to him when he turned 15. This Rodriguez guitar is the guitar that he made his first handful of albums on as well as my grandfather, who also recorded his first two albums using the same guitar."

FORK IN THE ROAD

Having seen his father practicing for long hours every day, Pepe didn't particularly desire a life as a full time guitar player. Instead he chose a career as a luthier. "I experienced my father and my grandparents being gone on very long tours for most of my childhood and I knew from a very early age that I did not want the life of a guitarist; being on the road and living out of hotels, I wanted to be able to go home to my family every day," he admits.

"In junior high school I started taking woodshop; I loved woodworking. When I was 15 I wanted to build a guitar in shop class; I went to speak to Yuris Zeltins, the legendary guitar repairman from the Blue Guitar in San Diego, who gave me some advice on how to build. It was way over my head so I decided guitar building was too complicated for me. Yuris was an inspiration to me and I have been going to his workshop at least once a week with my father since I was about one or two years old. I was always interested in what he did but just as a spectator," says Pepe.

However, in high school after entering a woodworking contest and gaining an honorable mention, Pepe's grandfather told him he was a guitar builder and an enthusiastic Pepe didn't look back. "My grandfather wanted to build a workshop in his house. I was very close with my

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PLAYER TIPS

"My advice to people who want to become a luthier is to be true to yourself. It is a very complicated and difficult thing to do at the highest level. If you build because you love it then that's what you should do. If you're looking for something cool to do or a job that seems like fun but it's not your passion then I would not try to build because it is such a long, tedious and difficult process. I love building guitars and ukuleles and the people around me also build because it's what's in their heart."

grandparents and in the last year of high school my grandfather got sick with cancer, so I skipped school as much as I could without sacrificing my grades to spend what I knew was the last bit of time I had with him.

"One day after telling my grandfather I had to leave to take a test, he told me I should just forget about school and build guitars in his house. I laughed this off and gave him a hug and a kiss and went to school but about a month later he died. At that point I really wanted to make one guitar in his honor so the summer of 1996 I finished high school and joined my father at his concert in Bellingham Washington; at that concert I met his friend Dake Traphagen, a very accomplished American luthier.

"Dake told me that if I ever wanted to build a guitar I could come to his workshop; I flew out that winter and made my first guitar with him and I enjoyed the process very much. He gave me very direct instructions on how to put the guitar together and kept it from being overly complicated. Upon stringing up the guitar, I was overcome with emotion and had to lie down on the floor. It was an epiphany that my path was to be a guitar builder. From that moment on I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life. I went on to study with Manuel Contreras Junior, Miguel Rodriguez and Jose Romanillos in Spain over the course of three summers."

A FATHER'S GIFT

His father's impressive classical guitar collection is one of Pepe's main sources of inspiration for his building. "The ones which inspired me the most,are Miguel Rodriguez guitars, sometimes Hernandez, Domingo Esteso and Antonio de Torres. Rodriguez to me build the complete guitar; they have incredible depth in tone, abundant power, clarity and playability. To me those guitars and Miguel Rodriguez are the benchmark of what a great guitar is. The guitars of Santos Hernandez are a major inspiration because they give you their sound freely and the tone is magical and mystical. They're quite light and make you want to never put them down. I also love the look of simple, clean lines and contrast that Santos Hernandez used on his instruments. I don't copy the way these legendary builders made their guitars; instead I inspire to create instruments that can match the tone, the power and the beauty in the mystique that is found within them. I've developed my own way of building while drying out the soul of the great Spanish guitars."

Pepe has built 285 guitars and more than 150 ukuleles; it's taken him 21 years but he has never counted the hours taken to build a guitar. "To me it doesn't matter how long it takes to build, what matters is the outcome and the joy the process brings. I like to build on my own and spend my days completely mentally engrossed in my work. My nephew Bernardo is building his own guitars in my workshop and has a budding career of his own. We work completely independently from each other and focus on our own instruments," says Pepe. As we discuss his building technique, I ask him about his preferences for woods. "I love working with various types of wood; each wood adds its own unique character to the sound of the instrument. Putting different combinations together helps you achieve certain types of sound and if I could only work with one combination, I'd be pretty sad because there are so many out there! But my choice would be western red cedar and Spanish cypress because to me that's the perfect combination of woods. I'd say only 5% of the orders I receive are for this wood combination, 35% are spruce tops with rosewood bodies, 55% are cedar tops with rosewood bodies, and 5% are other combinations."

The master luthier tells me about Romero Creations signature models, a line of instruments Pepe started about five years ago after befriending ukulele virtuoso Daniel Ho. "We've spent countless hours talking design and coming up with new ideas for instruments that I don't have time to build. Romero Creations was a way I could have these designs out in the world. The company is growing and having much success worldwide. I'm enjoying exploring my designs and working with Daniel and my father to create instruments that are readily available, great sounding, unique and affordable. There are definitely more designs to come from Romero Creations.

"I also have a line of guitar strings, which I developed with my father, called Pepe Romero Strings. La Bella Strings in New York manufacture these for us by our specifications. My father and I have created a line of classical guitar flamenco guitar and ukulele strings, which boost your instrument's power, sustain, clarity and overall performance. The reason we created our own line of strings was to take control of the end result. For my father it is of the utmost importance to have the right strings on his instrument when he's on stage playing acoustically and un-amplified." ■

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THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

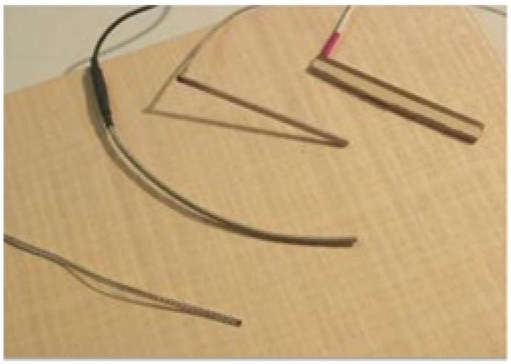
Celebrated luthier Nick Benjamin continues his discussion about pickups and their place in the acoustic world. This month: a guide to the main types

WORDS: NICK BENJAMIN

These days, there is often the expectation that 'acoustic' performances will be 'electro-acoustic', incorporating a pickup system that goes into a mixing desk, into a PA or alternatively a pickup system that goes into a smaller 'combo' amplifier system with built in controls for smaller gigs or functions. Many pickups will require some type of preamp to supply a suitable signal to the next stage and these may be separate units or an integral part of systems usually known as 'active'.

Separate stand-mounted microphones placed in front of guitars have become very uncommon, even for smaller venues. In fact, the inconvenience of having to get mic positioning and monitoring levels just right means it's generally only viable in very well-controlled situations with highly experienced engineers and well-positioned equipment in large halls rather than the often random or cramped open-mic set-ups.

So pickups have become essential, even for the occasional performer, and many acoustic guitars come with a pickup system from new. Now, though, there are many, many options for retrofitting a great pickup system to most standard acoustic guitars. In fact the options are often bewildering so I'll go through some of the main types available.



UNDER-SADDLE PICKUPS OR USTS (UNDER-SADDLE TRANSDUCERS)

Probably the most common type of pickup in both ready and retro fitted systems. Early versions were often built into the actual saddle of a guitar's bridge to ensure good transmission of sound to the pickup but now it is most common for a separate strip to be trapped beneath a standard bone or plastic saddle.

The most common technology used is piezo-electric, usually thicker crystal blocks, thinner flexible film or round coaxial cable. The type of sound produced by USTs is largely a product of the position it's picked up from: directly from the strings via the hard saddle. This positioning gives a strong, direct tone with a lot of string sound: not so much from the soundboard or body. This helps the sound cut through in louder environments with good resistance to feedback.

Piezo USTs have a varying reputation, probably due to their comparatively direct tone (which offends some) and because, in the past, either poor preamps or no preamps at all were used. Therefore that very little bass warmth was achieved due to electronic interaction between the pickups and inappropriate inputs of mixing desks and certain DI boxes. Most modern piezo-based UST systems have built-in preamps that stop this interaction and allow a full range tone to be achieved. EQ can be used to shape and calm the sometimes-very-present attack of this style of pickup. Its positive qualities often come out when implemented in dual systems that combine the direct tone of the under-saddle with another more 'natural' pickup or mic. For a good string-to-string balance, get an experienced person to fit them. A few companies have tried to use other tech to make USTs including capacitive film and a type of microscopic mic structure seeking to add more realism.

USTs: Great in an electric band situation or as part of a dual system. String-to-string balance can be troublesome in nylon-string guitars. Easy and reliable.

Made by: LR Baggs, Fishman, Highlander, Headway, EMG, B-Band, Schertler, D-Tar and many others.

worldmags.net

MAGNETIC SOUND-HOLE MOUNTED PICKUPS

Perhaps one of the easiest types of pickup system to fit yourself, this is essentially just like the pickups usually mounted in an electric but designed to grip the edges of your soundhole next to the strings and usually voiced for an acoustic instrument. Magnetic pickups vary greatly in complexity and performance: the simplest examples have no active electronics and the tone achieved can vary immensely. This depends on the type of input you plug into, due to electronic interaction.

'Active' versions with built-in preamps can help a great deal to get a consistent tone. Single coil magnetics can have a clearer, more transparent tone than humbucking dual coil designs but due to the fact that on most systems the guitar strings are not earthed (as they would be in an electric guitar), single coil examples can be very prone to picking up noise. String-to-string balance can be adjusted on many models using height adjustable pole pieces, usually essential due to the much higher output generated by the second string compared to the wound strings. This is because the bronze windings are non magnetic and only the thin cores of the bass strings contribute. Some non-adjustable examples have varying magnets built in for each string to compensate.

Achieving a 'natural' tone from a magnetic pickup is very difficult, even with complex EQ, but achieving a sweet, warm, musical and fun-to-play sound, particularly for finger-stylists, is where they can shine: alongside much use in dual systems, particularly paired with a mic. I recently helped DiMarzio develop a magnetic pickup specially designed for use in multi-source systems with built in phase switch: the 'Black Angel'.

Magnetics: Great for a fat, fingerpicked tone, paired with a mic for more realism. Works in many musical environments with the right settings and adjustments. Steel-strings only!

Made by: DiMarzio, LR Baggs, Seymour Duncan, Fishman, K&K, Sunrise and others.

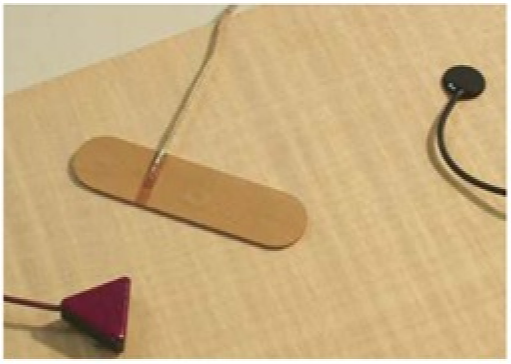
"Pickups have become essential, even for the occasional performer"

SOUNDBOARD MOUNTED PICKUPS OR SBT (SOUNDBOARD TRANSDUCER)

Many early acoustic pickups were mounted directly onto the guitar's soundboard, often with a type of 'putty'. Often know as 'contact pickups' or, more affectionately, 'bugs', this style of pickup can be very easy to fit but very tricky to use because the exact positioning on the soundboard makes a huge difference to the tonal balance and feedback resistance. Technologies include both piezo and electromagnetic and while a very natural sound may be potentially possible, achieving anything above lower volumes without feedback may be very difficult unless used as part of a multi-source system. Some very high quality modern versions of this style are available should you choose this route. Preamps and much EQ are generally essential.

SBTs: Very low fitting impact but frequently requires much fettling to get reliable results. Most suited to lower volume solo work unless used as part of a multi-source system. Can work well for higher pitched instruments such as the mandolin and violin.

Made by: Schertler, Taylor (part of the Expression system), Fishman, LR Baggs (mandolin), Headway (violin family) and many others.



BRIDGE-PLATE MOUNTED PICKUPS

Arguably a type of SBT but with much more reliable results due to the positioning and therefore a completely separate beast in my view. The bridge-plate inside the guitar is a type of lamination that sandwiches the soundboard with the bridge and is a very strong and stable part of the guitar, but also has a lot of sound energy travelling through it. So it's an ideal place to attach a pickup and get loud and stable tone without the very direct tone of a UST, meaning it has fast become one of the most popular styles of pickup with offerings from many manufactures in more recent years.

Usually two, three or four individual piezo-based pickup elements, sometimes contained in a single housing, are attached to the bridge-plate, often with glue or strong adhesive tape, right under the saddle area where they 'hear' the direct string tone but it is filtered through the wood producing a less aggressive attack than a UST with more influence from the soundboard as a whole. This may be the best of all worlds for many players, specially for more 'acoustic' settings where a more attacking tone isn't required for cutting through in an electric band. Preamp and EQ are usually required for consistent results, as with most piezo based systems. Often paired with a mic to add a little detail and air to the sound or a UST to blend between the two contrasting tones.

Bridge-Plate Pickups: One of my favourites for medium volume playing in 'acoustic' settings. Fitting must be done right but can be attempted at home with care. Very flexible for different instruments, including classical guitars. Great in multi-source systems.

Made by: K&K, Dazzo, LR Baggs, Pickup the World, DiMarzio, B-Band and a few others.

Next month it's on to guitar mounted microphones and multi-source systems that combine two or more pickups or mics. ■

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ADY JOHNSON

STYLE… FOLK/POP/BLUES

Based in south-east London, I write, record and perform acoustic-based songs, both as a solo artist and with other musicians. Both my 2011 debut album *Tell The Worry Dolls* and 2015 EP *Thank You For The Good Things* received critical praise, while my live work has included a New York tour in 2014 and supporting Scott Matthew on his 2016 tour. All the tracks on my new album *London Songs* were written since moving to London from Colchester, and many reference places, people or experiences I've had here. I gave producer Gerry Diver creative freedom with the instrumentation, but insisted the vocal and guitar remained at its core. My favourite track? 'Put The World On Standby' has some good hooks, and I like the chord progressions. For live work, I play a Gibson J-45 standard. It's very playable and responds equally well to a sensitive touch, or a good thrashing! On *London Songs* I also used a classical guitar made by Antonio Lopez Martin. I do use a pick, although I use fingerstyle predominantly at the moment. The only song where I use a pick on London Songs is 'The Glass Tower'. I run the Gibson through a Fishman Aura Spectrum imaging pedal, into an AER Compact 60 amp. Occasionally I use an MXR Micro Amp gain pedal. I also use a Logjam stomper – used sparingly, it's great when I'm performing without a percussionist. Alternate tunings? Yes, open D and open G. I'm currently working on my third album, plus performing tour dates around the UK. The most important thing I've learnt as a musician? It may not make you rich, but it will make your life richer!

www.adyjohnson.co.uk

JAMES EDWYN

STYLE… AMERICANA

I grew up listening to blues and folk and learned guitar in school. At 39, I'm based in Glasgow and I write songs, sing and play guitar with my band James Edwyn and the Borrowed Band. The other members are Scott Keenan (keyboards, vocals), Neil McDonald (drums), Ronnie Gilmour (guitar), Ross McLaughlin (bass) and Emma Joyce (vocals). We formed in 2013, played in each other's bands, and now have a studio in Glasgow. We've just released our second album, *High Fences*, which was produced by Neil and Ronnie. The songs are both political and personal. 'Passing San Ysidro', is about someone trying to better his life who gets a job and is then arrested and deported for doing so. It asks if that's moral. I always write on guitar. I've been playing since I was 11, so I don't think about it. I have two acoustics, a Martin HD-28 and a Gibson J-30 tobacco sunburst. I DI straight into the PA. The pickup in my Martin is a Trance Audio Amulet M, which I really like. For recording vocals I use a Neumann U47 FET if I can, as it really works with the mid in my voice. I play both pick and fingerstyle. I can do claw hammer, but when I flatpick I tend to keep a couple of fingers handy in case I have to jump strings. I use a five-string capo, so I'm on the second fret and have an open E. You get nice runs and can still use standard chords and play lots of shapes up the neck while keeping that bass. I used it on the tracks 'Quoting Sagan' and 'Burning Man'. Having recently played at Glasgow's Celtic Connections and London's AmericanaFest, we're currently booking a few summer festivals and some gigs further afield.

www.facebook.com/JamesEdwynAndTheBorrowedBand

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DAMIEN O'KANE

STYLE… FOLK/POP

I'm 39 and a proud Irishman living in Yorkshire. I played in my family band from 1990-2000, moved to England in 2001 and became a professional musician in 2003. I sing and play guitar, tenor guitar, electric tenor guitars and tenor banjo. Most of my music comes from a traditional Irish background – I love the idea of marrying old songs with new soundscapes. My third solo album, *Avenging And Bright*, aims at taking folk music in a different direction, singing traditional songs and colouring them in a modern way. My favourite track, 'Poor Stranger', is an old Irish song that we developed into a 'folk-disco-electronic' track, should that term exist! I play two Mike Soares' electric tenor guitars and two acoustic tenors – a 1928 Martin-028 and a custom-built model based on the Martin and made by Yorkshire luthier Peter Barton. I use Orchid DIs built in to a custom-made Isophase Audio unit which signals up to five instruments in stereo. This connects to my pedalboard and enables me to run stereo FX on everything. I use Strymon FX pedals, including the TimeLine, BigSky, Flint and BlueSky as well as a Wampler Euphoria Overdrive pedal and a TC Electronic Spark Boost pedal. I use a pick – my music is energetic, and a pick suits it. My electric tenor guitars are tuned G#C#G#C# and AEAE, and my acoustics are tuned DADA and C#F#C#F#. I also play six-string – it's my main instrument when I play in Kate Rusby's band. I play two Collings acoustics – a D2H and a D1. Incredible sounding guitars, I use mainly DADGAD or DADGAE with them. I'm currently working with Ron Block [Alison Krauss Band's banjoist] on an instrumental record for release this summer. I've also got some tour dates planned for early this year.

www.damienokane.co.uk

© Ray Whittaker

ROGER PUGH

STYLE… FOLK/ROCK

A professional entertainer and musician, I'm 68 and live in Bromyard, Herefordshire. As a solo performer, I work as a minstrel, a jester, a storyteller and an MC. I also sing and play mandola, acoustic guitar and spoons in The Stoned Cherries, alongside Dave Evans (acoustic/electric guitar, mandolin, bouzouki, vocals), Aly May (whistles, accordion, vocals) and Matt Donaldson (bass instruments, foot drums, accordion, guitar, vocals). Matt is also a sound engineer. Since our formation in 2013, we've been developing our sound and original material, playing at folk clubs, festivals, music venues, pubs, village halls and parties. Our debut album, *Baked In A Pie*, has just been released. It doesn't have a theme, just a selection of mainly original songs and tunes that we enjoy and can do justice to live. My favourite track is 'Run With The Moonlight', written for my son Sam. When composing, I sometimes use guitar, sometimes mandola. I start with chords, or a riff, or both, then, la-la-ing, followed by gobbledygook lyrics that are cleaned up to make sense and crafted into a form of poetry. My main instrument is a Fylde Octave mandola with a Fishman pickup. The more it's played, the better it sounds. My guitar is a natural electro-acoustic Takamine FP360 – a musical workhorse. I DI via PA or straight into the mixing desk, and use reverb on the mandola. I use a pick, occasionally finger picking. I'm currently working with the band on new songs, tunes and arrangements, and from February, I'll be promoting my solo CD *A Colourful Journey*. It's a concept album based on the journey of my life, featuring a host of talented musicians. Future gigs include the Red Lion Folk Club, Kings Heath (14 March), Brecon Midsummer Folk Festival (30 June) and an autumn trip to Somerset.

www.dgand2.wix.com/thestonedcherries

www.roger-pugh.co.uk

PILCH AND THE MIDNIGHT TINKLERS

ONLY THE GOOD ★★★☆☆

WWW.PILCHMUSIC.COM

Andy 'Pilch' Pritchard describes his four-piece acoustic outfit as being like an unplugged Springsteen meeting Jason Mraz in a dark North London alley wearing a Stetson. Mystified? Fair enough, but when Pilch sings about 'sitting staring at a screen all day, I can't take it, driving me insane', it's clear his vision is far more down to earth. And when he gets to bemoaning his midlife crisis or asking for affection over the throbbing bass line on 'Give Me Love', you can only hope this is all a bit tongue in cheek. But there are some fine songs lurking here, and the band's breezy delivery creates just the kind of good time stuff we all need right now. **JP**

RONNIE EARL & THE BROADCASTERS

THE LUCKIEST MAN ★★★★★

WWW.RONNIEEARL.COM

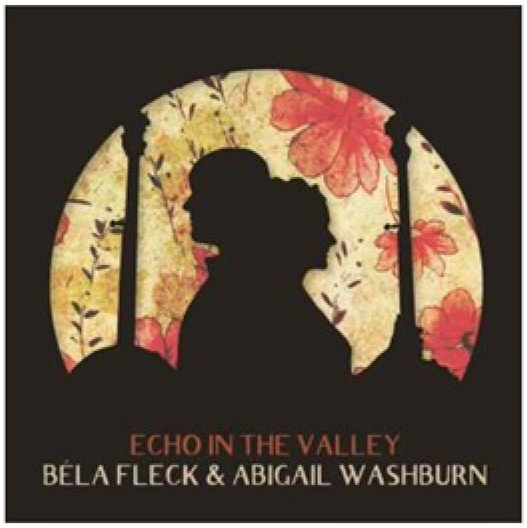
No one who's ever caught Ronnie Earl in action could fail to be in awe of the pure amount of blues and soul he's able to squeeze from six strings. Yet because of health issues, he remains largely unknown, playing around his home town of Boston. Once again, whether it's the sweet jazzy lilt of the instrumental 'Sweet Miss Vee', an ethereal acoustic take of the Rev'd Gary Davis's 'Death Don't Have No Mercy', or a blues drenched 'So Many Roads', plucking shards of crystal guitar magic from thin air, Ronnie's on dazzling form. Eat your heart out Joe Bonamassa. **JP**

THE TRANSPORTS

A TALE OF EXILE AND MIGRATION ★★★★☆

WWW.THETRANSPORTSPRODUCTION.CO.UK

Peter Bellamy's ballad folk opera was originally released in 1977, an ambitious project featuring the cream of the 70s folk revival, the Watersons, Martin Carthy, June Tabor and many others. Forty years on, his tale of forced migration of people on a convict ship to Australia has a particularly poignant resonance. With narrator Matthew Crampton acting as the lynch pin, he leads an outstanding cast of young bucks including Nancy Kerr, members of Bellowhead, and the Young 'Uns, as they perform Bellamy's thought-provoking tale. Following the hallowed ground of the original is a daunting task, but this bunch have pulled off a show that has too many highlights to name. **JP**



BÉLA FLECK & ABIGAIL WASHBURN

ECHO IN THE VALLEY ★★★★☆

WWW.BELAFLECK.COM

Relentlessly pushing the boundaries of his instrument, Béla Fleck is the Jimi Hendrix of banjo, a musician of staggering virtuosity, able to adapt the instrument to myriad settings. And his pairing with Abigail Washburn has seen his sonic palette expand even further. Their banjos intertwine spectacularly on bluesy 'Don't Let It Bring You Down', Béla's 1905 upright banjo bass adding a spooky counterpoint to Abigail's skittering tenor. But it's 'My Home's Across The Blue Ridge Mountains', with Abigail's yearning cry, that'll stop you in your tracks. The humble banjo has never sounded so good or downright exciting. **JP**

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DAVE GOODMAN

CUT TO THE CHASE ★★★★☆

WWW.DAVE-GOODMAN.INFO

Dave Goodman is a Canadian guitarist based in Germany, and, as you'd expect from a man with a guitar signed by John Lee Hooker, it's obvious there's not much he can't handle. Moods vary from the slinky Weissenborn licks he pulls off on the sleazy 'Hypnotised', to the simmering Robben Ford jazz lines on 'Waitin' On Your Love', and the driving acoustic-based 'Don't Turn Around'. The whole thing's impeccable, and Dave has one of those smooth, California-meets-James Taylor honeyed voices, that slide effortlessly around his lyrics. Maybe a little more grit in the fuel line wouldn't go amiss, and even some quality control – you can't help asking 'would the real Dave Goodman stand up' – but that gripe aside, this is hugely impressive. **JP**

JEFF THE HORSE HORSEY

TALES FROM THE OLD WEST ★★★★☆

WWW.JEFFHORSEYMUSIC.COM

A man who probably wishes he'd been born in Western Virginia rather than Bridgwater, the Horse's third album once again finds him exploring the mythology of dusty American backroads, and its stark, unforgiving landscapes. An album that never ceases to intrigue, whether it's a tale of meeting a girl in the city ('I was trucking my life away' on 'Oh Caroline') or the Mississippi hill country stomp of the scary 'Root Man', the Horse hammers his guitar and sounds as though he's having a ball. But it's the mammoth 'Rattlesnakes', an edgy nine-minute treat with vague psychedelic shimmies of reedy Farfisa organ, glorious grungy Neil Young guitar and allusions to vultures, deserts and yes – rattlesnakes – that takes the honours. **JP**

JOHNNY DOWD

TWINKLE, TWINKLE ★★☆☆☆

WWW.JOHNNYDOWD.COM

From the off, you know this is never going to be easy, and when Johnny gets to massacring the title track, yes – that cherished nursery rhyme, over a maelstrom of crazed keyboards and ugly guitar, it's an unworldly alliance inducing aural shell shock. Not content with this desecration, Johnny turns his attention to the truly sacred ground of a clutch of cherished American folk standards, notably 'House Of The Rising Sun, 'The Cuckoo', and even 'My Darling Clementine', rampaging through them like a demented half brother of Tom Waits, just given a roomful of cracked up synths for Xmas. There's weird – and there's Johnny Dowd. But maybe we should all keep trying to understand where he's coming from? **JP**

BARNEY BENTALL

THE DRIFTER & THE PREACHER ★★★☆☆

WWW.BARNEYBENTALL.COM

Singer with a Canadian platinum album-selling band in the 80s, there's an endearing relaxed feel to Barney Bentall's tenth album. After all, when you've attained such heady heights, it's probably easy to feel that music's there for fun rather than fortune. With its' lazy chug-along rhythm, infectious chorus, keening fiddle and faltering piano, 'The Miner' pays homage to the classic sound of The Band, music that wraps itself around you like a warm coat. It's a feel that continues for the rest of the album, his hushed acoustic balladry telling tales of care worn friends and relatives, at times introspective, but never maudlin. **JP**

THE ROLLING STONES

ON AIR ★★★★★

WWW.ROLLINGSTONES.COM

Following hard on the heels of last years' *Blue And Lonesome*, credit to the BBC for coming up with this selection of visceral live cuts, recorded when the Stones were sowing mayhem throughout the land. And it only takes a few bars of hearing 'Keef' rip into 'Down The Road Apiece' or of Jagger snarling 'Walking The Dog', to understand why the band tore up any joint they played. Unlike their moptop rivals this gang could really play, and play hard. The early hits are all here, 'The Last Time', 'It's All Over Now', 'Satisfaction', and whether hamming it up on the Joe Loss Pop Show or Saturday Club, the band's early primal energy remains unrivalled. **JP**

FALSE LIGHTS

HARMONOGRAPH ★★★★★

WWW.FALSELIGHTS.CO.UK

Jim Moray and Sam Carter might have long nailed their colours to the folk mast, but when they crank into 'Babylon', an electric guitar driven melee of horns and even a hurdy gurdy, it's pretty startling. And the surprises keep coming. The twin spiky African guitar lines that introduce 'The Ombudsman', an instrumental that gradually builds to an orgasmic climax, could be from a Foals out-take. Of course this is 'Folk', but after a bit of necessary gloom on the haunting ballad 'Captain Kidd', the band shake the rafters with the sub-punk drive of 'Murder In The Red Barn'. Totally enthralling, with great arrangements and superb playing, this is a gem. Watch out Mumfords. **JP**

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MATTHEW ROBB

SPIRIT IN THE FORM ★★★☆☆

WWW.MATTHEWROBB.COM

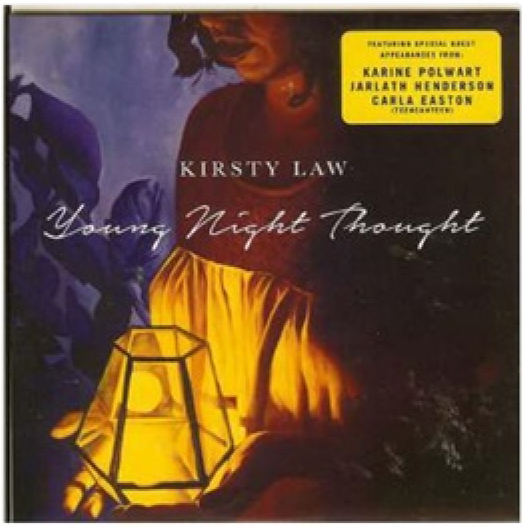
Matthew Robb's a UK singer-songwriter based in Cologne, Germany, writing songs that – were they literal – would lead you to believe his life is wrecked somewhere between hell and high water. 'I'm a sinnerman, noose around my neck', he drawls on 'Sinnerman', a rollicking tale of self disgust, propelled by a swinging country back beat, punctuated by some exemplary slide breaks from Lance Harrison. 'Until Then' finds Matthew hollering about 'getting long in the tooth' and 'fending off shadows', the kind of redemptive gloom that Michael Chapman has long peddled. Maybe not Sunday morning shower music, but Matthews' no frills approach reeks of an honesty that's strangely engaging. **JP**

LEVELLERS

WE THE COLLECTIVE ★★★★☆

WWW.THELEVELLERS.CO.UK

It's 30 years since Mark Chadwick and his merry men blew out of Brighton, thumping out songs of disaffection, their stock in trade a comfortable blend of crusty folk and post punk, that just couldn't fail with bush people, and those that wished they were. Over the years they lost some of their fire, even drifting dangerously towards indie rock territory, but as this new acoustic collection shows, their fire still burns bright. Recorded with a string section and John Leckie of Stone Roses fame producing, the band revisit old favourites like 'Liberty' and 'Hope Street', alongside new songs 'Drug Bust McGhee' and 'The Shame', the latter an indictment of the refugee crisis, proving the band won't be laying down their fiddles any time soon. **JP**



KIRSTY LAW

YOUNG NIGHT THOUGHT ★★☆☆☆

WWW.KIRSTYLAW.COM

Named after a Robert Louis Stephenson poem, on her first album this young Scottish singer initially weaves a dextrous path between the animated vocal mannerisms of Ani Di Franco and the wide open instrumentation of early Massive Attack. Interesting. The dreamy Scottish pastoralism, the gentle post folk arrangements on 'Underneath The Sycamore', and 'The Lovers' Tryst', allow Kirsty's vocals to float around the mix in cinematic glory. But by the time Jarlath Henderson joins her for the dreary 'Fledgling', things have taken a turn for the worse, the throbbing percussion introducing the 'Cutting Knife', coming as welcome opium from the prevailing sense of doom and gloom. Enough is enough. **JP**

THE LOW ANTHEM

THE SALT DOLL WENT TO MEASURE THE DEPTH OF THE SEA ★★★★☆

WWW.LOWANTHEM.COM

Recorded after a car crash wiped out most of their equipment, the Providence Rhode Island outfit returned to basics and the result is a largely acoustic concept album, in which most of the songs weigh in at about the two minute mark.. Apparently inspired by a salt doll fable, unsurprisingly the words to the 12 songs feel strangely irrelevant. And maybe that's as well. With that out of the way, you can lie back and enjoy Jeff Prystowskys' breathy vocals, the trippy electronica and dream like haze, as one soft focus song morphs gently into another. The whole thing could have been a disaster, but instead it's a quiet triumph. **JP**

CHRISTY MOORE

ON THE ROAD ★★★★★

WWW.CHRISTYMOORE.COM

Recorded at gigs across the British Isles, the 24 tracks on this double album find the ex Planxty singer in fine rollicking form. And from the opening bars of his anthemic 'Ordinary Man' – an indictment of our times if ever there was one – the crowd whooping and hollering in glee as they clap along, the scope of his material is breathtaking. There are so many great moments it's hard to single out a few, but his comic dig at 'Camilla' at Glastonbury on 'Don't Forget Your Shovel', his beautiful reading of the traditional 'Black Is The Colour', and the visceral rhetoric of 'North And South', a song co-written with Bono and The Edge, prove he's a troubadour with few equals. **JP**

MAY ERLEWINE

MOTHER LION ★★★★☆

WWW.MAYERLEWINE.COM

'I was made to long for the sky, I wanna be wild,' May Erlewine sings over the opening bars of 'Wild', a sparse echoing piano and a distant violin, conjuring visions of the vast landscapes of her Michigan home. It's a prelude to an album of simplicity, grace and gloriously-understated arrangements, in which May's acoustic guitar frames songs of uncertainty, unrequited love and a prevailing sense of awe. Quite where she's coming from is uncertain: there's almost a religious undertone to 'Never One Thing', her pleading on 'Shake The World' almost agonising. But it doesn't matter. *Mother Lion* is a thing of rare beauty, one of those albums you just hope doesn't slip through the net. **JP**

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"It's much harder now to avoid the clichés"

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CHRIS EATON FINGERSTYLE GUITARIST

INTERVIEW: JERRY DOUGLAS

Chris Eaton consults Dobro legend Jerry Douglas for some tips

Not since issue 121 have I written about playing Dobro, by which I mean square neck lap style resonators. So, here's my first column in a series about this style of slide guitar, and what better way to kick things off than with some words of wisdom from the world's greatest Dobroist himself – Jerry Douglas (pictured left). The following is previously unseen material taken from my interview with Jerry last year.

Do you think it's hard for players to find their own voice and avoid the clichés on the Dobro?
"It's so different from when I started because there was only Josh Graves, Bashful Brother Oswald and Mike Auldridge. But now there's like, whoa, a lot of people – so yeah it is hard to find your own voice, it's much harder now to avoid the clichés and everything. I mean I invented a lot of the clichés. It depends what kind of music you like and what your influences are. There are all these things that go into finding your voice. There's your guitar and what that sounds like, because not every guitar sounds the same. How you hit the string, what sound you get when you hit the string. I move my right hand a lot to find different voices. If I want to be really smooth I'll move away from the bridge and find the place where there's the least amount of clatter. Because it is a metal on metal instrument and the sound is going into a metal chamber. It's kinda hard to be clean and not have all these extra harmonics and crazy metallic sounds going on. What I always tried to do was to be as clean as possible and to be as in-tune as possible. It's like a singer – learning how to sing you scoop up to notes, you don't hit the notes right on until you've done it for a while. It's the same playing Dobro or violin, where there are no frets. A lot of it is muscle memory in the end. But to find your own voice I think it's important to learn the vocabulary of others first but then give the listener your adaptation of how the licks go."

One of the first things you need to know when learning the Dobro is what tuning to use. The most popular is High Bass G (GBDGBD), not to be confused with Open G, which uses lower notes and is a common bottleneck tuning for regular round neck guitars. As the name suggests, High Bass G tunes the sixth string up to G. It consists of two octaves of a major triad. Root, major 3rd and the 5th. ***Example 1*** *shows a C major scale using this tuning.*

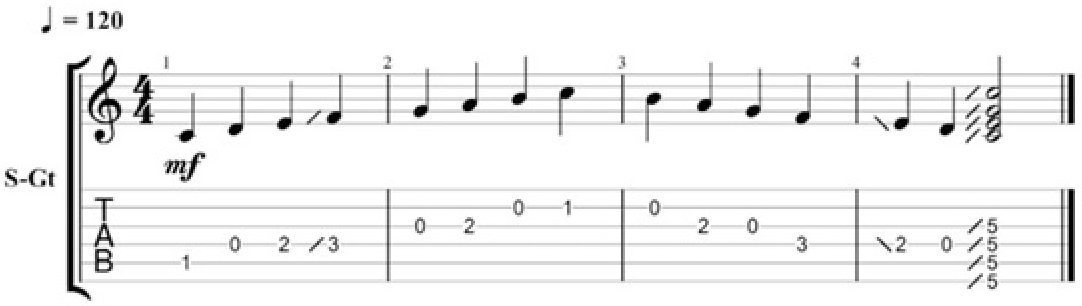
Another popular Dobro tuning is Open D (DADF#AD) which is also used on regular guitars for bottleneck or fingerstyle playing. ***Example 2*** *lays out a Bm pentatonic scale in Open D.*

When using your tone bar to play these scales, only the tip of the bar should touch the strings. This is achieved by raising the back of the bar up with your wrist. A Stevens style bar is best for this technique, instead of the bullet type models which are harder to grip and lift off the strings.

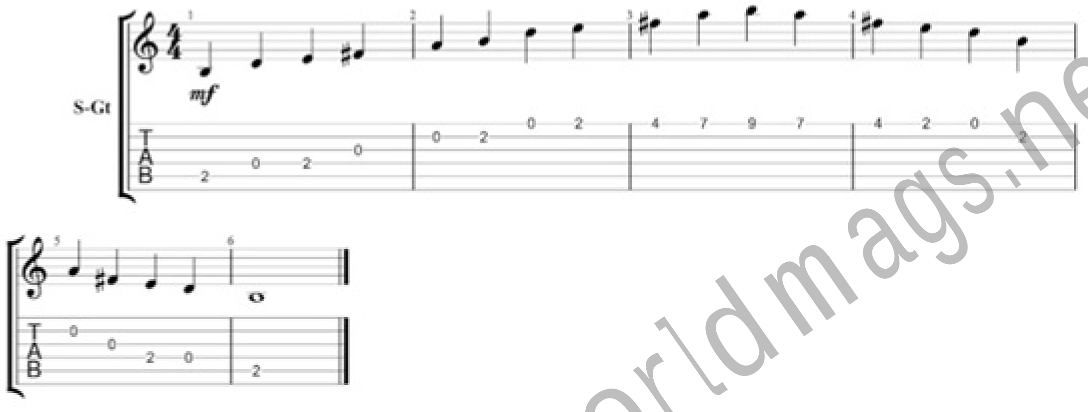
I use various open tunings when playing slide guitar. For a long time one of my bottleneck Stratocasters had a Hipshot Trilogy Bridge fitted, which enabled me to quickly change between tunings on the same guitar. Very helpful when touring with just one guitar. Hipshot have now created a similar device for the Dobro. I asked Jerry about it…

How is the Hipshot Double Shot tuning bridge working out for you?
"Oh yeah it's great, you can change (tunings) in the middle of a solo and it all comes right back. And the tusk in the pickup is smooth, you know. Nothing hangs up in there, it all comes back, even the coarse wound strings. Dropping it from G (GBDGBD) to D (DADF#AD) is a long way but you can go right to it and start playing it. In my current show I think I'm only going to D one time but in general I would say it's half and half. And when I do solo shows it's even more because I think it's a better key to play in if you're accompanying yourself. I wanted to be comfortable with D tuning because there's so much more material there. I always fooled with it but I didn't really get into it until after I played a little pedal steel for a while and saw what was possible. So when the Hipshot thing came out it was the answer to my prayers." ■

EXAMPLE 1 - C MAJOR SCALE



EXAMPLE 2 - B MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE



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THOMAS LEEB FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

FULL TAB ONLINE

'GROOVEYARD'

Leeb channels his inner teenage metal fan with this percussive piece

We covered the intro to my tune 'Grooveyard' quite a few issues ago and this month we're finishing what we started! 'Grooveyard' is a bit of a throwback to my teenage metal years, so it's only fitting that the tuning is pretty much all power chord: CGCGCEb.

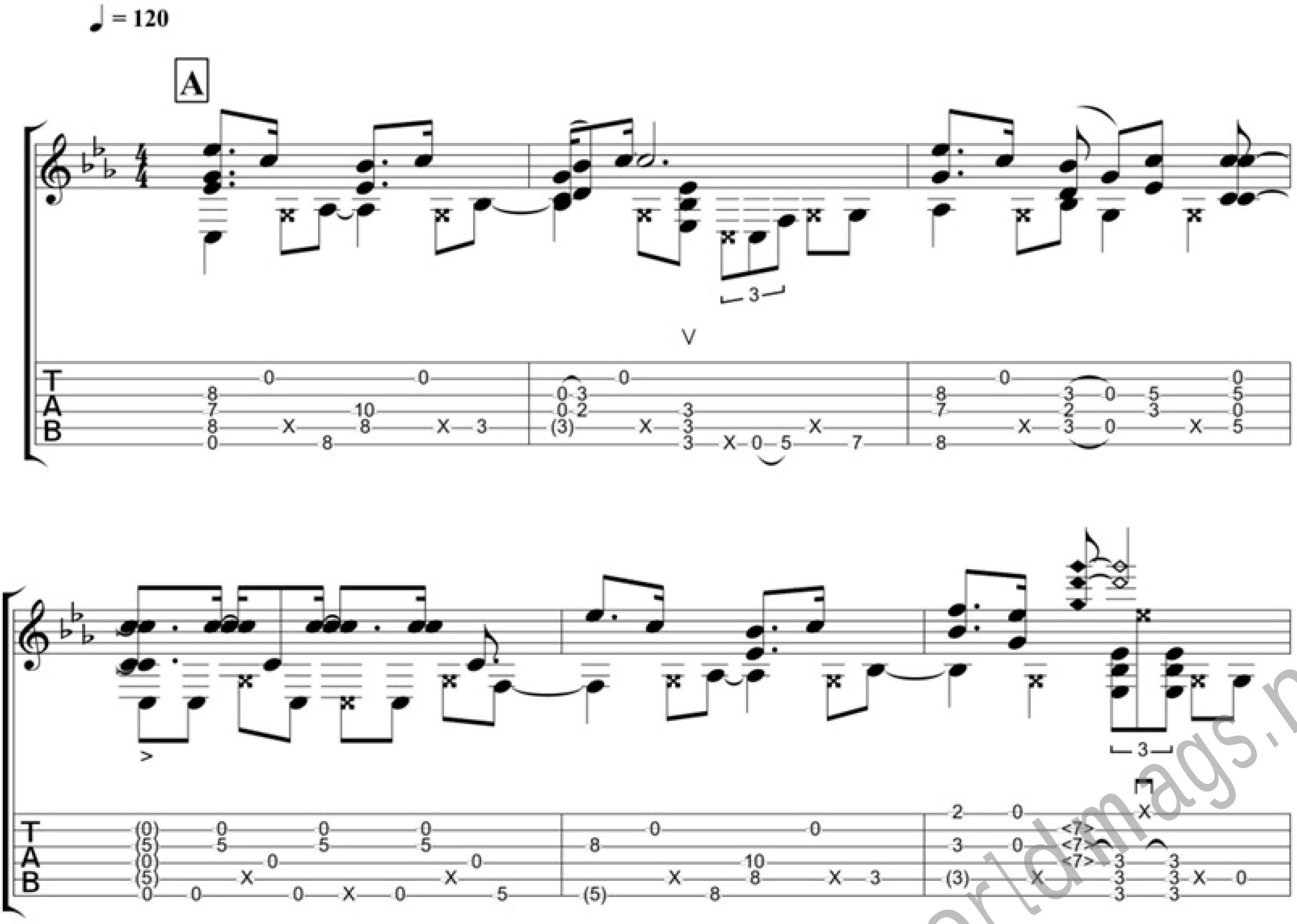
You can find a video of me playing it here: http://bit.ly/2qLdfeD

The entire piece is anchored down by what I like to think of as the tried-and-true 'Don Ross Powergroove', with thumb clicks on beats 2 and 4 secured to the bedrock of rhythm. These are notated with an x on the fifth string: the side of your thumb clicks down on the bass strings in normal playing position. Leave it there, this prepares you for the subsequent plucking of the same string. For example, the click on beat 2 in the first bar lands on the 6th string, which you pick right afterwards, whereas the click on beat 4 lands on the 5th string. When in doubt, just check what happens right afterwards. The x on the sixth string shows you where you hit the top of your guitar with the heel of your hand in normal playing position without moving the rest of the fingers too much – a gentle thud will do. This results in a lovely bass drum sound.

The bit that trips up most people who work on this tune is the transition from beat 3 to 4 in bar 2. All I can offer here as help is that beat 3 is the bass drum percussive sound described above and that the click is on beat 4. And that the bass drum sound, left-hand pull-off and hammer-on constitute a triplet. This is a strange one, so I'm completely open to hear creative and groovy workarounds.

While getting this tune off the ground smoothly will be a challenge, the meat and bones of this shouldn't be too difficult or frustrating to absorb. I hope you will take chord shapes, rhythmic ideas and picking patterns, play around with them, and let them take you to some previously unexplored places! ■

'GROOVEYARD'



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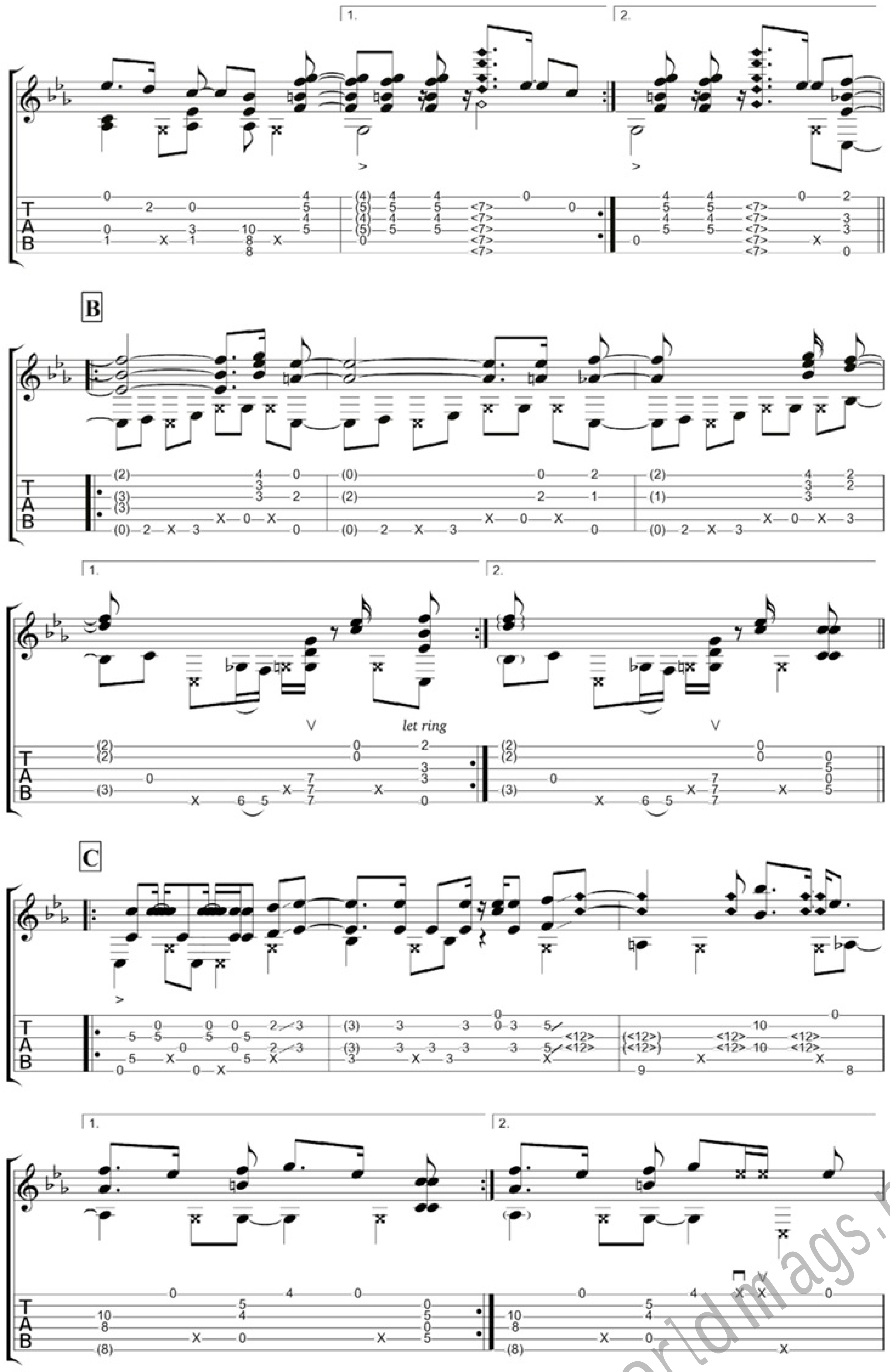

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DANIEL HO GRAMMY WINNING UKELELE AND SLACK KEY GUITAR PLAYER

THIRDS AND SIXTHS

Daniel Ho explores thirds and sixths and explains why they are so common on a 'ukulele

Thirds and sixths are frequently-used intervals on the 'ukulele. They are effective in filling out single-note melody lines with harmony, and are fun techniques for improvising. The reason they are often used is practical: pitches are defined by only one hand – generally, the left hand on a right-handed instrument – and it is easier to add notes that move in parallel to the melody they are harmonising. For instance, it is comfortable to play two lines that move in contrary motion on piano because the right and left hands can simultaneously move in opposite directions. However, on the 'ukulele, the four fingers of the left hand that define pitches – the index, middle, ring, and pinky fingers – have physical limitations as to what they can execute on four strings.

Let's take a look at how to play sixths on the 'ukulele in the key of C major. The following example shows the sixths in the key of C major on strings 2 and 4. The melody of the example is a C major scale that starts and ends on E. This is because E is the lowest note in a C scale that can be played on the string 2.

Now let's see where the sixths are in the key of C major on strings 1 and 3. In addition to playing these examples as written, it is a good idea to play them in different patterns and also randomly skip around so you can familiarise yourself with where they are on the fretboard.

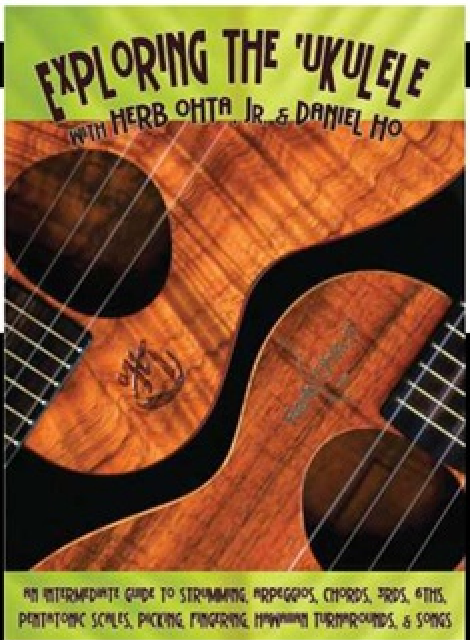
The next three examples illustrate where the thirds in the key of C major are on strings 3 and 4, then 2 and 3, and 1 and 2.

Notice that the broader intervals of the sixths sound more open, and the thirds sound tighter and closer. Experiment by harmonizing some familiar melodies, like Beethoven's 9th Symphony, with sixths and thirds. You'll find that one might sound better than the other depending on the tune.

For your reference, here are the sixths and thirds in the key of F major.

The following examples are the sixths and thirds in the key of G major. It would be beneficial to learn where the sixths and thirds are on the 'ukulele in all twelve keys, but the keys of C major, F major and G major are a good starting point as they are three of the most commonly used keys in 'ukulele music.

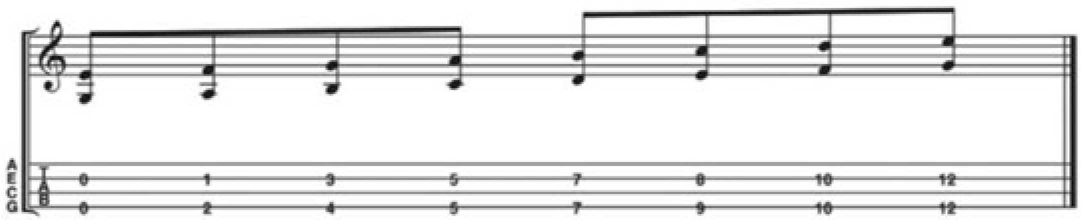
It will take some time to get acquainted with all these positions on the fretboard, but the ability to instantly harmonise any melody with sixths or thirds is a valuable asset to add to your 'ukulele bag of tricks. Rather than just playing through these examples, a fun way to memorise them is to try to play the melodies to your favorite songs with thirds and sixths in all three keys. ■



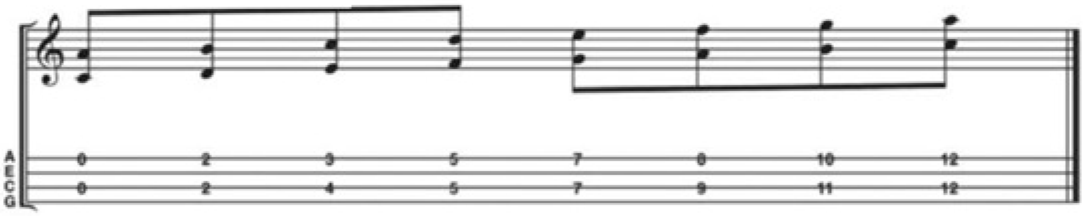
Online Extra

To learn thirds and sixths in all 12 keys as well as many other intermediate 'ukulele topics, check out "Exploring the Ukulele" at the following link: https://goo.gl/DhtfnF

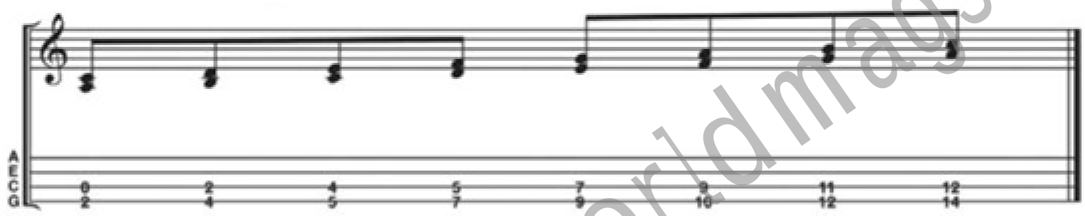
C MAJOR – 6THS ON STRINGS 2 AND 4



C MAJOR – 6THS ON STRINGS 1 AND 3



C MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 3 AND 4



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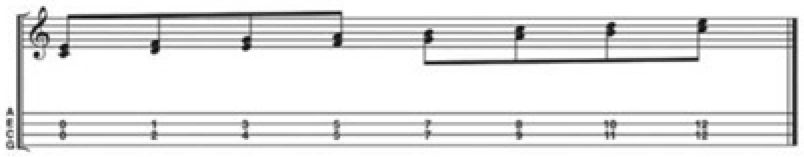
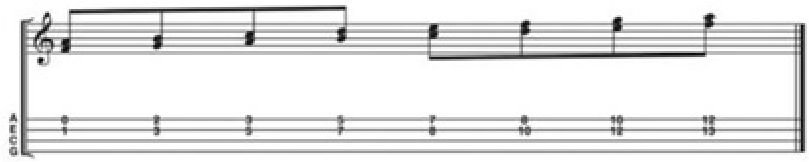
C MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 2 AND 3

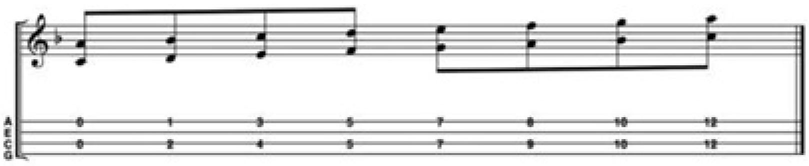


C MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 1 AND 2

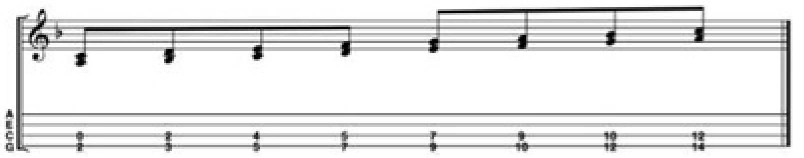


F MAJOR – 6THS ON STRINGS 2 AND 4

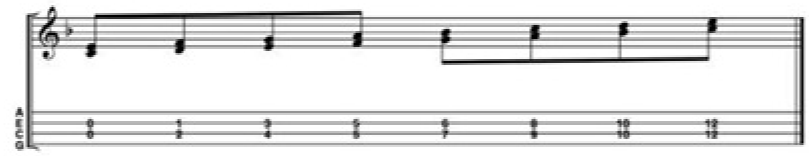
F MAJOR – 6THS ON STRINGS 1 AND 3



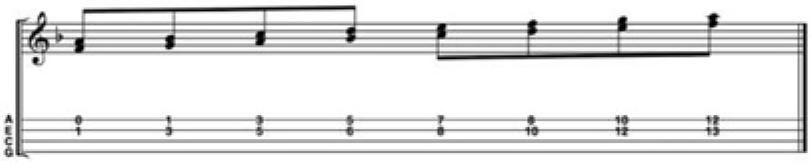
F MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 3 AND 4



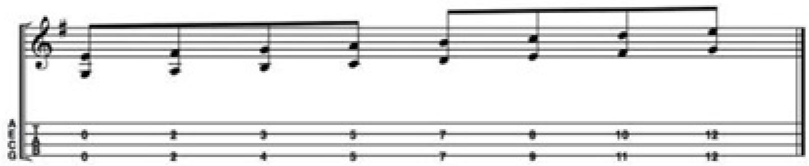
F MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 2 AND 3



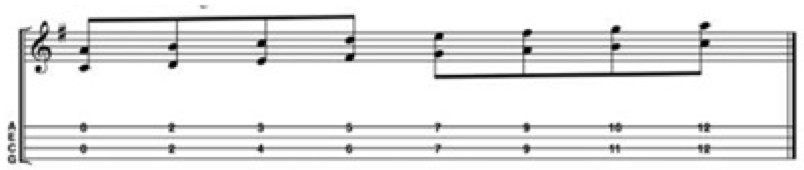
F MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 1 AND 2



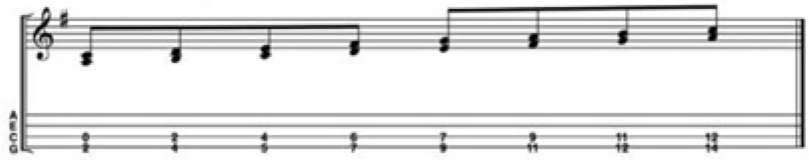
G MAJOR – 6THS ON STRINGS 2 AND 4



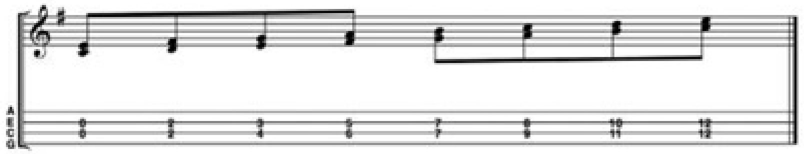
G MAJOR – 6THS ON STRINGS 1 AND 3



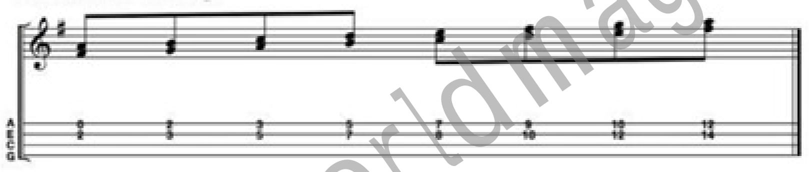
G MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 3 AND 4



G MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 2 AND 3



G MAJOR – 3RDS ON STRINGS 1 AND 2



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CLIVE CARROLL ACOUSTIC VIRTUOSO

'FREYLEKH'

FULL TAB ONLINE

Clive presents an instrumental circle dance from the Jewish klezmer tradition

This issue I've arranged a Freylekh for you. Freylekh, Freilach, Frailach, or even Frailock translates from Yiddish as 'happy or merry tune' and it is an instrumental circle dance from the Jewish klezmer tradition. These dances have been performed at weddings all over Eastern Europe and beyond. The first time I heard the melody printed here was on the debut album by the Irish band Lúnasa, where it is given the title 'Iúil', July in Irish. The arrangement I have created for this article is influenced by that version.

This arrangement is in B minor and opens with a barre at fret 2. The picking-hand thumb plucks the four bass notes while the melody works best with the i, m, a fingerings printed in the standard staff notation. These fingerings may feel slightly awkward at first but they are well worth the effort. The barre is released by the start of bar 2 before a half-barre is formed in bar 3. In bar 4 try using the fret-hand finger 3 on the high D, as this will remain in place for the G chord in bar 5. From bars 5-6 we hear, what is to my ear, a very attractive concluding melodic phrase. Notice the pull-off in bar 5, which benefits from a strong crisp snap above the fret 2 barre chord of F#7.

Section B really begins with the three upbeat melody notes at the end of bar 9. It's a nice idea to sound a partial slide, or portamento, from the F# at the end of bar 9 to the high B in bar 10 and the fingerings marked should help with this.

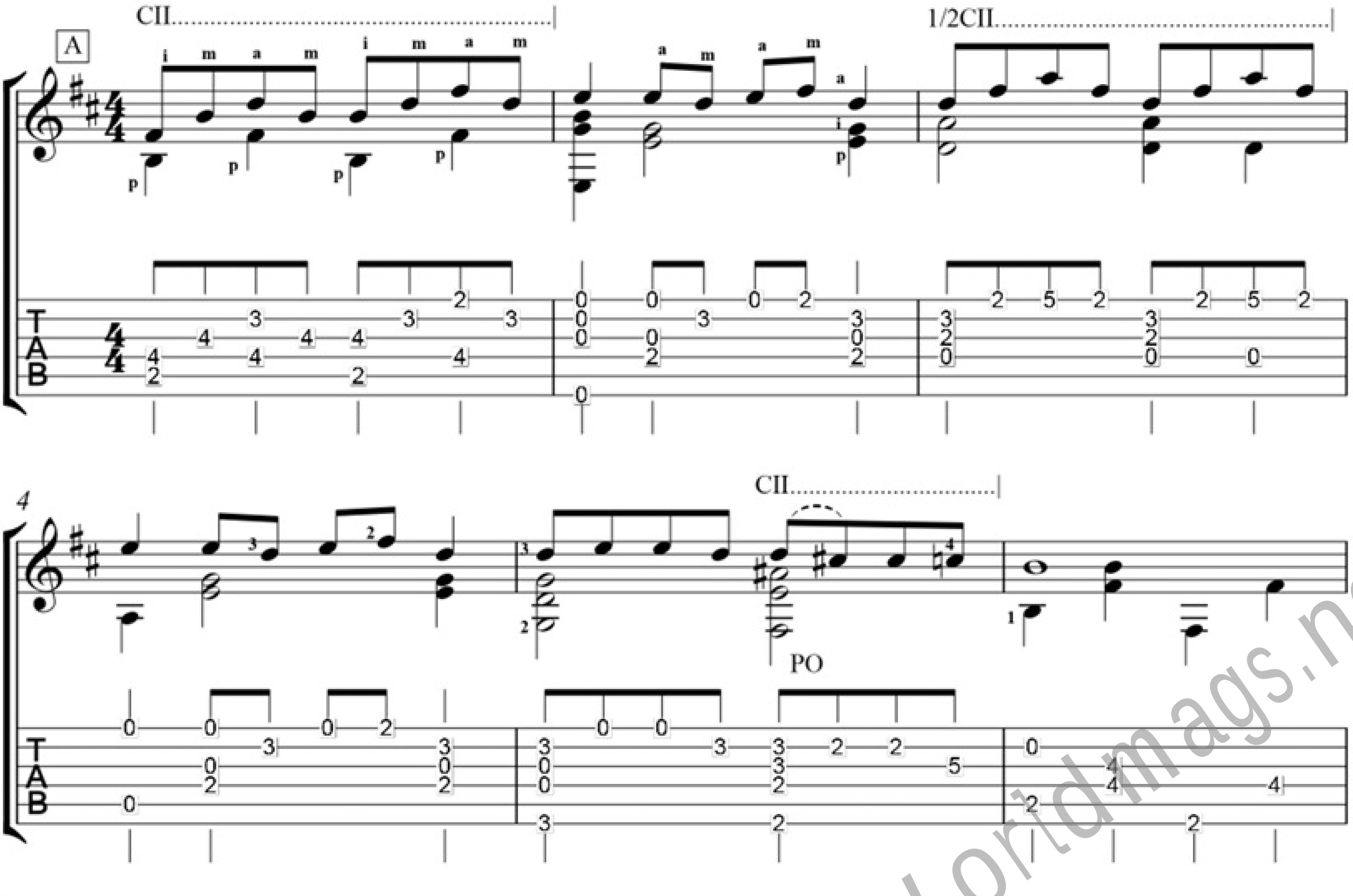
The transition from the last chord of bar 14 to the Em6 at the start of bar 15 is a little tricky. The chord-connecting finger three on string three is very helpful. Practice slowly to ensure clarity and be aware of any physical tension build-up. In bars 18-19 the melody is passed between strings 1, 2, and 3, and the picking-hand fingerings are marked. A slight fret-hand finger stretch appears within this phrase but if you form the seventh-fret notes first and then drag the first finger back to the G on the first string, third fret, you will find that the shape sits quite well.

A further tricky passage occurs at bar 20 where fret-hand fingers 1 and 4 should be placed and the first pull-off sounded, before adding fingers two and three to the shape.

The aforementioned 'very attractive concluding melodic phrase' – how catchy – has been re-harmonised at the end of bar 24, and again at bar 27 in 'power chord' fashion! The variations of this phrase can be used as substitutions when they appear within the repetition of the piece in its entirety. Typically, you might play the whole Freylekh at least three times through. Have fun learning this infectious tune! ■

For an audio version visit: http://bit.ly/2EvcaJZ

'FREYLEKH'



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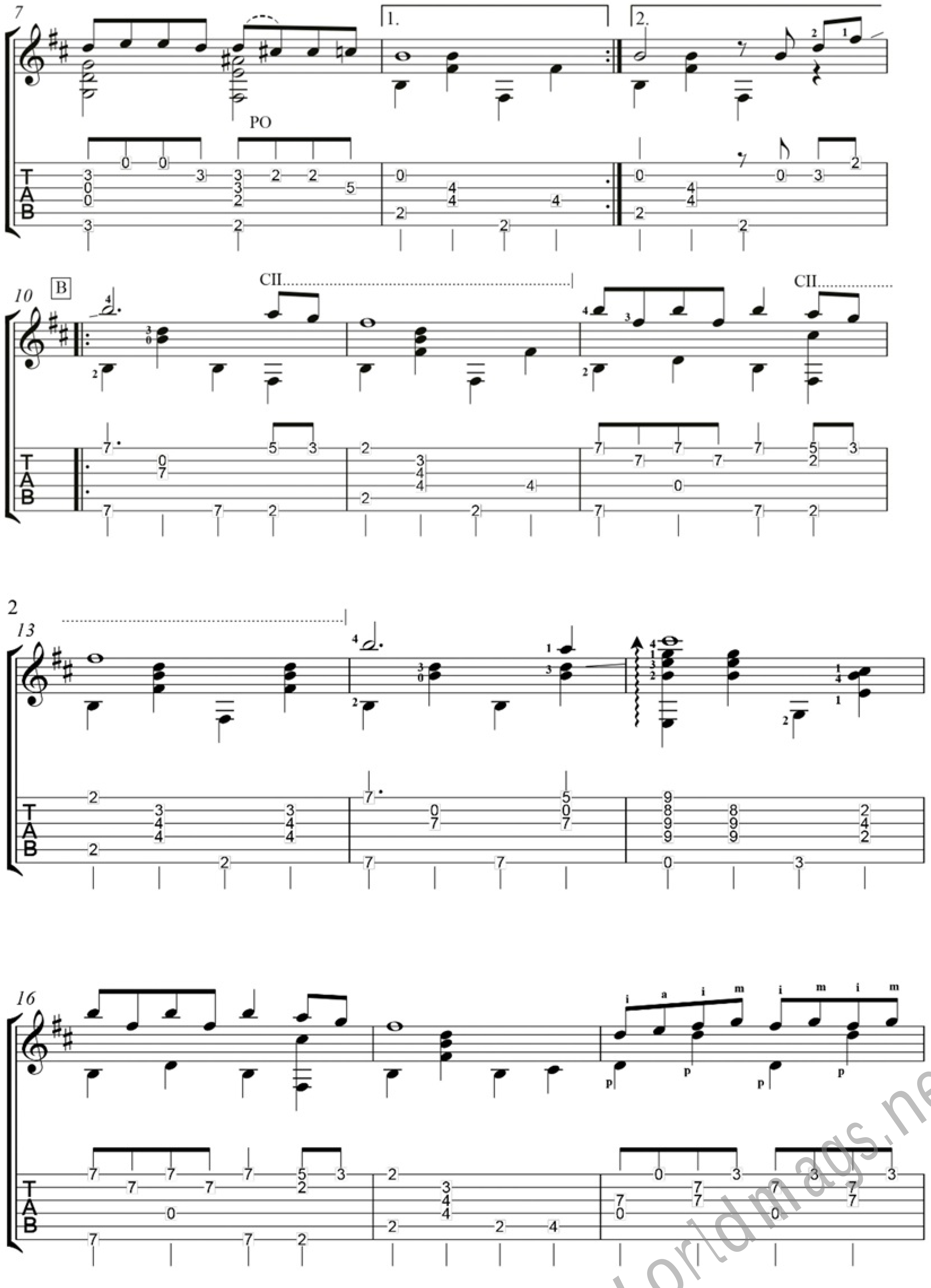

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LEON HUNT UK BANJO EXPERT

'LITTLE MAGGIE'

Less haste, more speed, says banjo guru Leon Hunt

In complete contrast to my last column where we discussed playing slow, lyrical music on the banjo, with Bob Dylan's 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune', this month we're going for the full '100 mph' bluegrass with one of American traditional music's most enduring songs, 'Little Maggie'. Coincidentally, Dylan, along with countless others, also recorded a version of this song for his 1992 album, *Good As I Been To You*.

One of the most difficult and important jobs I have, as a banjo teacher, is to convince the student to not practise too fast. I invariably end up feeling like a naggy old killjoy, as it's usually all the fast stuff that brought them to the banjo in the first place. The truth is, (here comes the nag) if your technique is good and your fingers, through well-earned muscle memory, instinctively know where they're supposed to be going, playing fast really shouldn't be a problem. Moreover, you'll generally be more relaxed, which will improve the flow and accuracy of your playing at all speeds. When Earl Scruggs devised this approach to the banjo back in the late 30s, early 40s, he left absolutely nothing to chance. Every finger on both his right and left hands knew exactly what they were supposed to be doing, every step of the way. The resulting fast, effortless stream of notes is exactly what audiences found so intoxicating.

At this stage I should point out that 'the nag' becomes even more painful (potentially soul destroying for the student) when it comes following the question 'How do I increase my speed?' In this instance the individual has usually been playing a while, learnt a sizeable repertoire of tunes, but is struggling to ramp up the speed without everything getting ragged and ultimately falling apart. The solution is almost always the same and involves the deeply unpopular suggestion of pulling apart and rebuilding pieces of music they thought they already knew. Ouch!

'Little Maggie' is about as fast and hard-driving as bluegrass gets. This particular arrangement is from an album I recorded

> **"The truth is if your technique is good, playing fast really shouldn't be a problem"**

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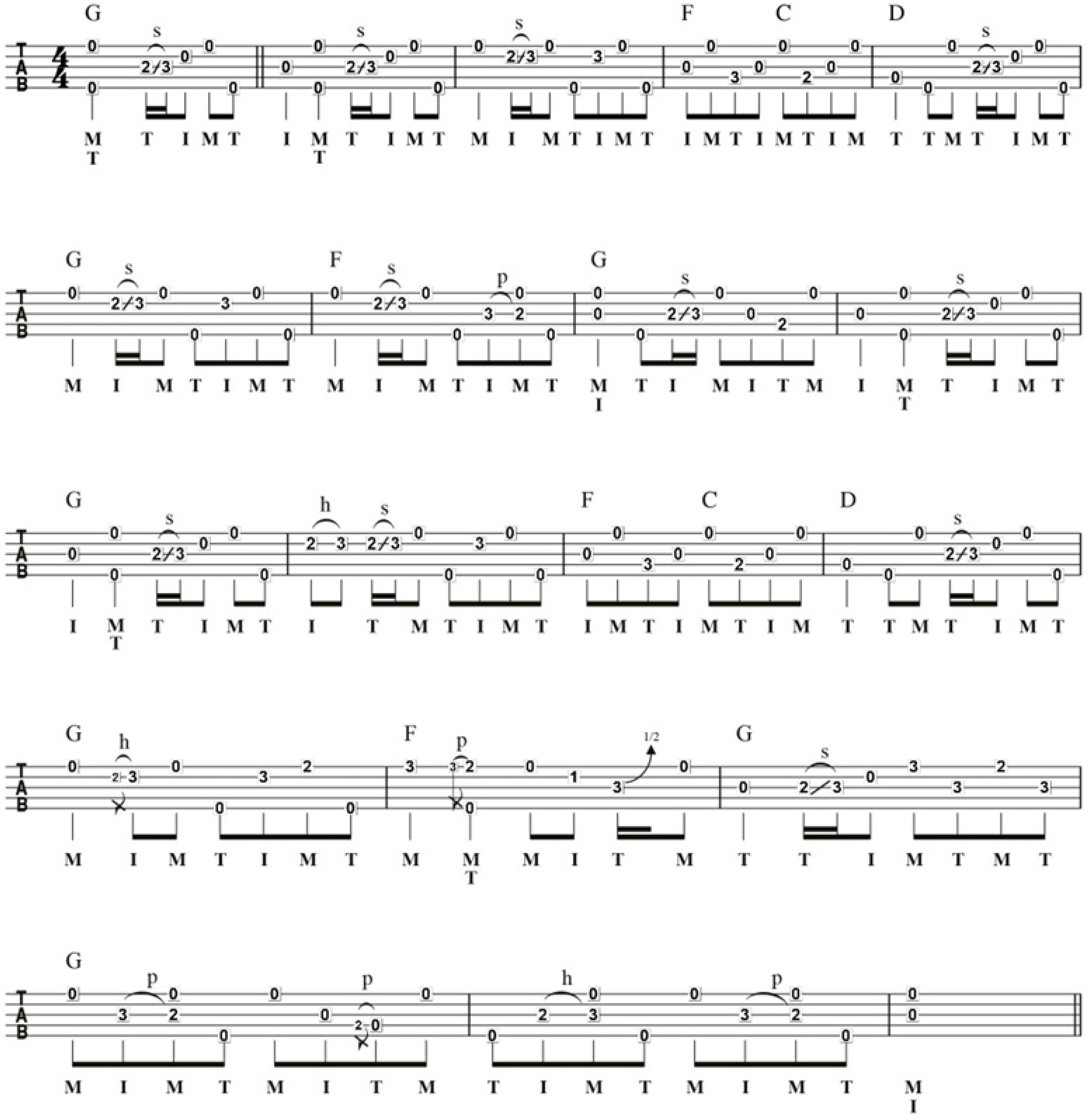
'LITTLE MAGGIE'



several years back called *Farewell Blues* and clips along at well over 150 bpm. Transcribed here is the opening solo and can be heard at both full and half speeds at: **https://tinyurl.com/y94ndf8v.**

The solo leads off with a strong pinch on the first and fifth strings. Pinches can be a 'kill or cure' thing in bluegrass banjo playing. Done badly, they will do nothing more than sap energy from your playing and make everything sound scrappy. Done well, they will add masses of punch and drive. Pinching simply means to play two or three strings simultaneously. If these strings are picked slightly out of sync with one another, you'll create an unpleasant flamming effect. Another thing to avoid is getting an incorrect balance of volume from the played strings. With this solo having a fair amount of pinches in it, of various types, think of this as a good opportunity to improve this all-important technique.

This arrangement also has lots of what we might call 'standard banjo vocabulary'. For this reason, look out for phrases and licks you may have already encountered in other songs and tunes. Not only will this save you time in learning, it will also help to improve your understanding of the language of banjo in general, highlighting how modular this style of playing really is. As ever, keep a close eye on the right hand fingering and make sure you're being consistent with the fingers you choose to use on your left hand. Any inconsistencies here will play havoc with your development of muscle memory, and leave your fingers unsure of what they're supposed to be doing. Going back to 'the nag': start slow and weed out any ambiguity and inconsistencies. Once you can play it smoothly and confidently slow, begin to gently ramp up the tempo. Remember to breathe and keep your shoulders dropped and you'll be at 150 bpm and beyond before you know it. ■

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CHRIS WOODS CONTEMPORARY ACOUSTIC GROOVE PLAYER

ACOUSTIGYM

Chris Woods presents an acoustic antidote to a new year's gym membership

Over the next few articles I'll offer you an acoustic guitar alternative to the new year workout, to get you into a flow of self improvement that won't require you to break a sweat.

While many players use a 'physical hard work' approach to their practice, a 'finger brain' workout or mind gym can be more effective. Working for hours on improving finger strength has pros and cons – so our 'Acoustigym' is focused on honing those fine motor skills to give you continuity and creative control in your playing. We'll focus on two specific areas – dynamic control and the life of a note. The exercises can be used for finger pickers or plectrum players. If you work through one exercise each week for two months, there'll be a fresh batch ready in my next article.

EXAMPLES 1 & 2

A simple arpeggio pattern. This is about shifting your emphasis on different notes/beats. Notice in the notation the > symbol: this indicates you accent that note (i.e. play it louder, by increasing the velocity). The accented note shifts from beat 1, to 2, to 3, to 4. Practice it very slowly then work up to around 120 BPM. Using the same principle, in **Example 2** the pattern is a quaver pattern, so we have twice as many notes in the bar. The accents shift in the same way as previously, but it will be more of a challenge. Again, take this slow. This is more of a mental than a physical workout. Focus!

EXAMPLE 3

I have added in a very basic melody into our arpeggio. The accent doesn't shift but instead is in the same place in each bar. The idea is to accent the third beat. Use your little finger and first finger in your fretting hand to fret the melodic notes.

EXAMPLE 4

One of my favourite exercises. We are playing two notes in the bar that are accented, the first with the sideways arrow is accented, and the second with the upwards pointing arrow is accented even more strongly. Remember in music there isn't just loud and quiet, there is everything in between.

EXAMPLE 5

We now look at the duration of notes. The pattern is relatively simple. There are three bars. In the first bar, play each note for one whole beat so the notes lead into each other. In the second bar we play quavers, so 'kill' the note (by taking the pressure off your fretting finger) halfway through. Try counting 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 and keep the 'and' silent. In the final bar we are using semiquavers, so essentially playing 1 e and e 2.

EXAMPLE 6

I have taken the notes from **Example 5** and moved them to a different part of the guitar, using open notes, so when you kill a note you will need to use your fretting hand in a different way to kill the open note. You can stop a closed note by removing pressure, you kill or stop an open note by actually touching the string to stop it vibrating.

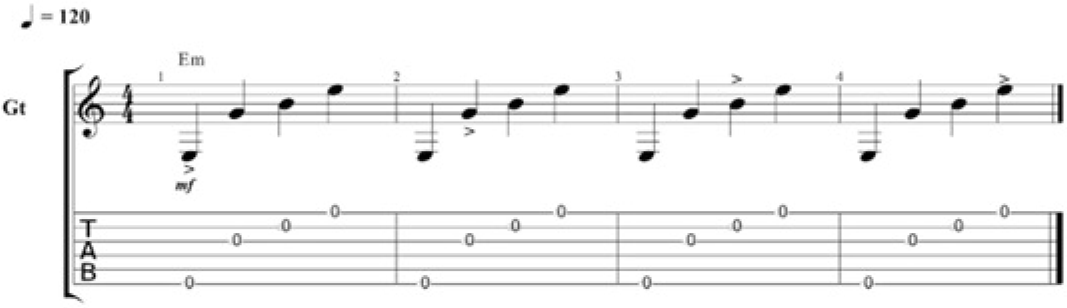
EXAMPLE 7

In this example we have referred back to using the position from **Example 5**, but we are now including the idea of shifting accents. I think this should be approached more slowly than any of the other exercises, to give your brain time to compute the two different parameters.

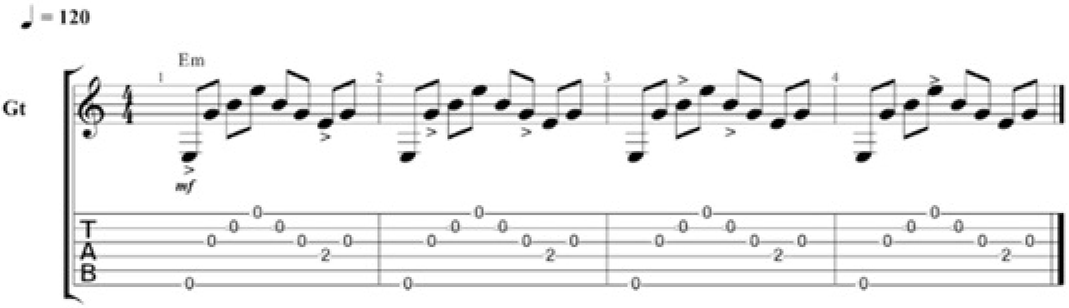
EXAMPLE 8

Again, this exercise is bringing together both ideas. Stay focused and keep it slow. ■

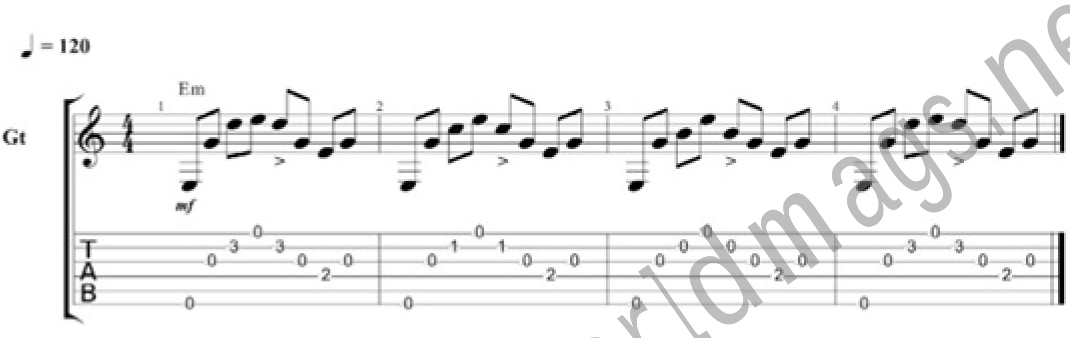
EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



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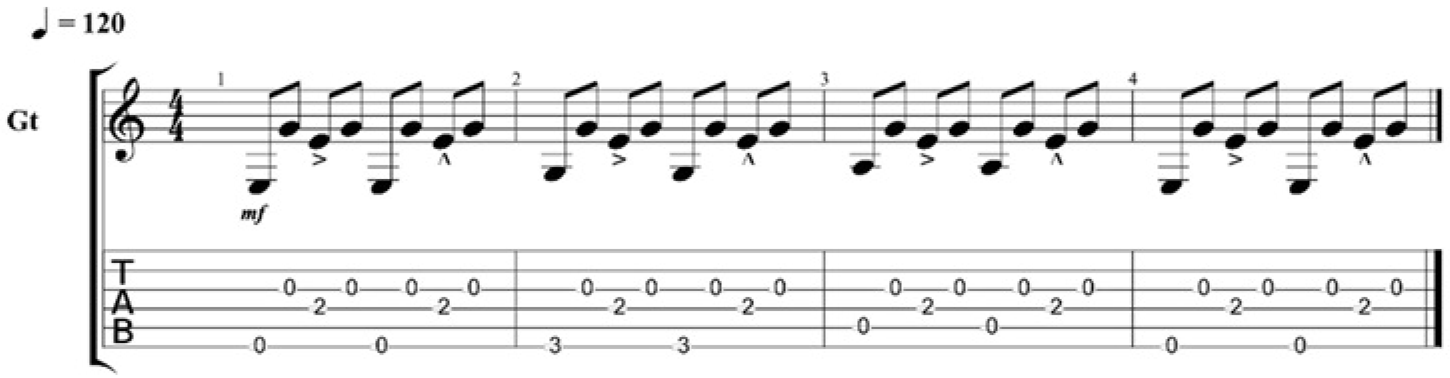
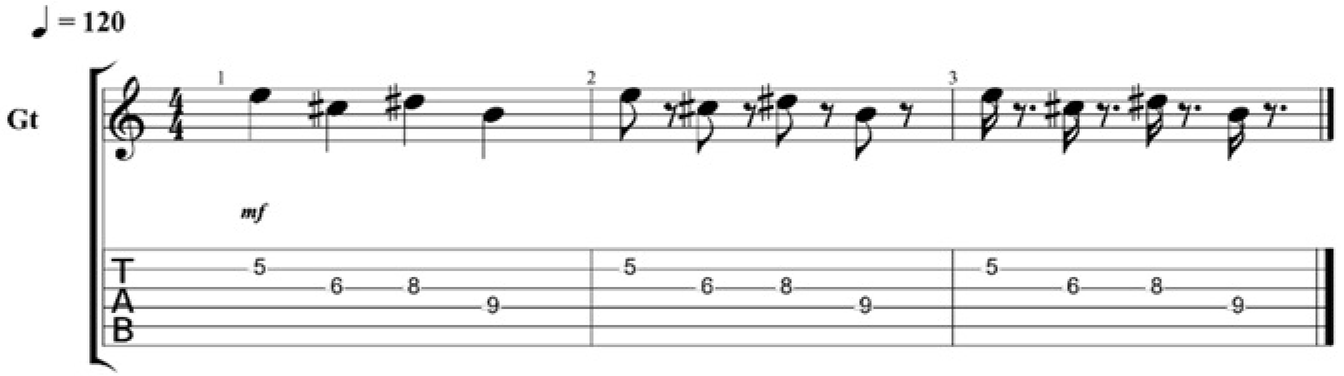
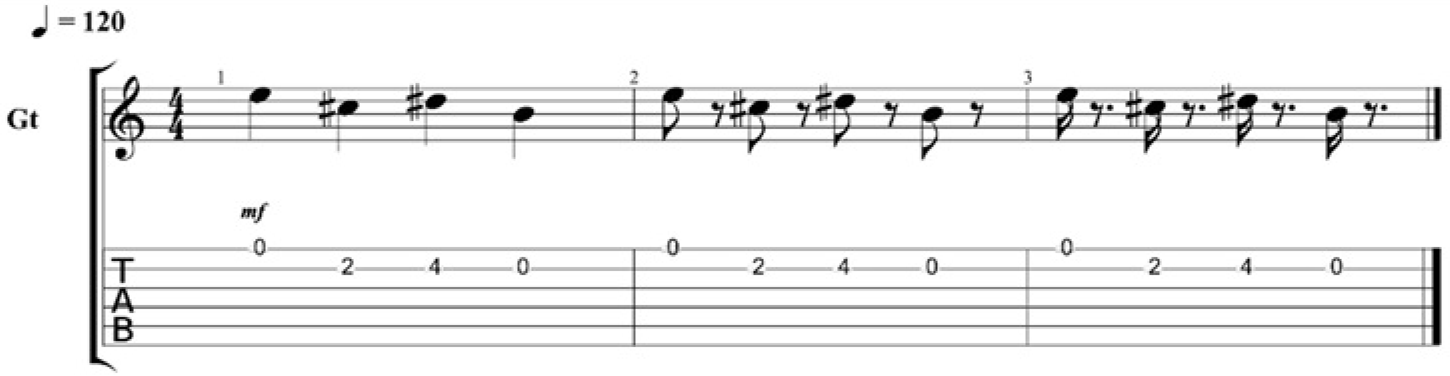
EXAMPLE 4



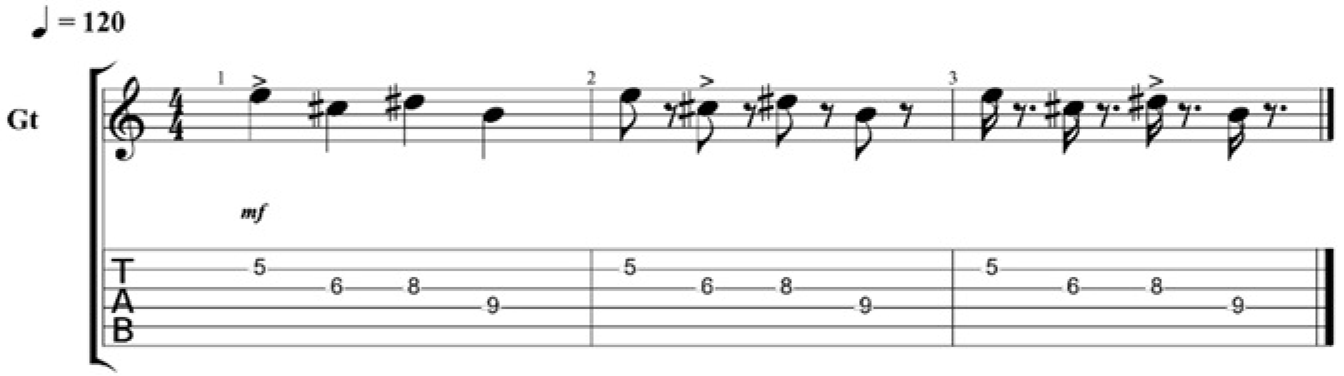
EXAMPLE 5



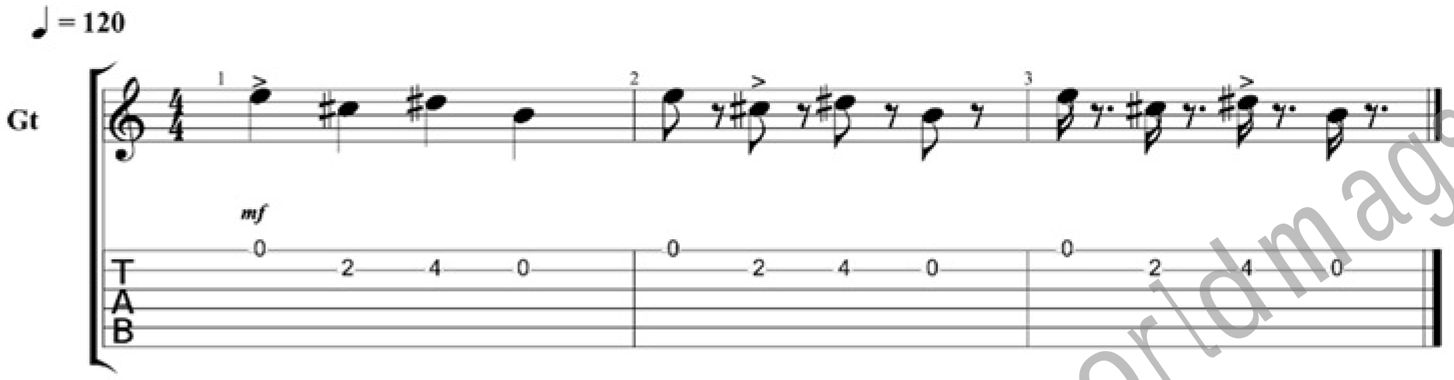
EXAMPLE 6



EXAMPLE 7



EXAMPLE 8



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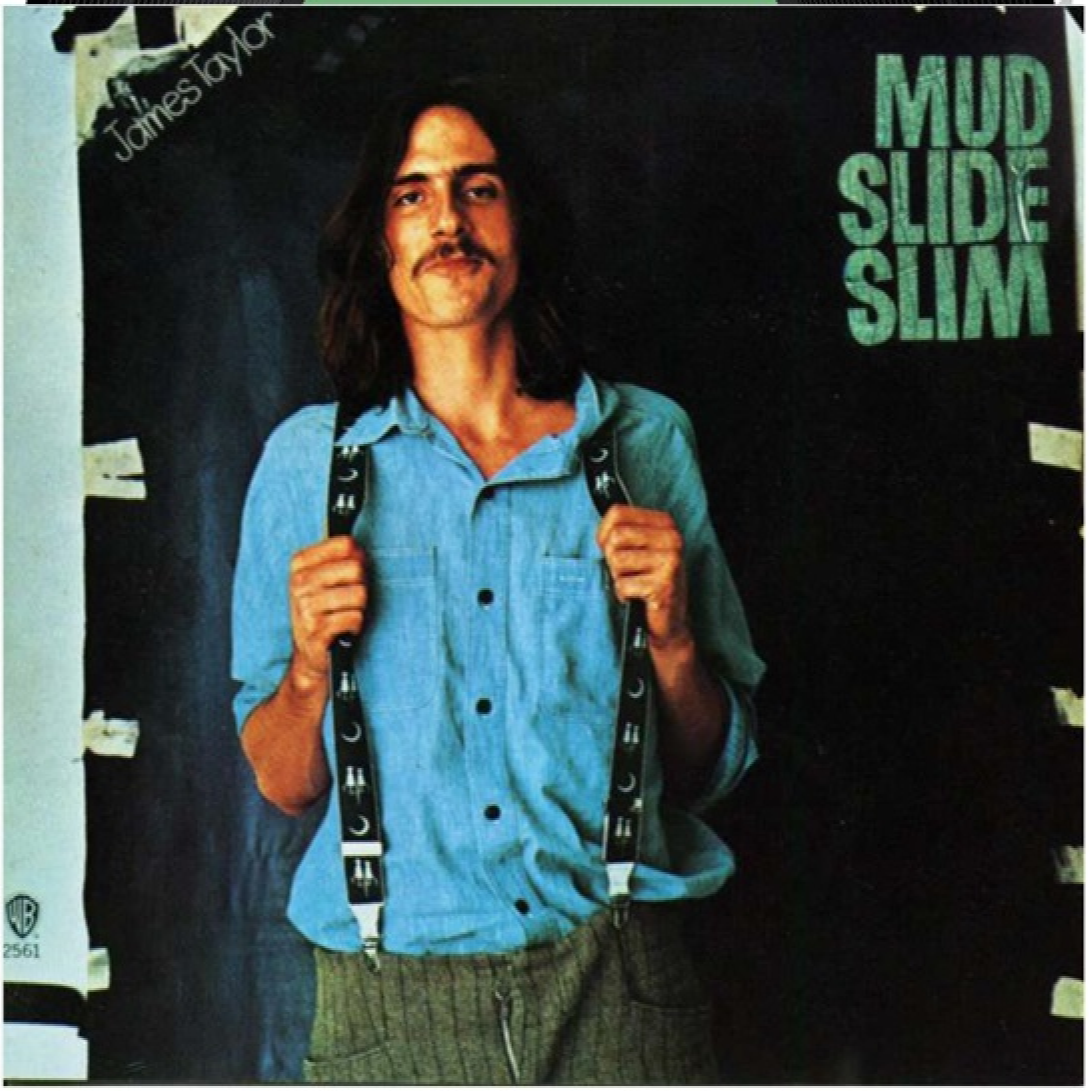

After a wildly successful second album, all eyes were on James Taylor's next release. With Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon, he didn't disappoint

After his self-titled debut album flopped, James Taylor's second, *Sweet Baby James* (1970), was exactly the right album at the perfect time. With people in the USA still reeling from Vietnam, the Kennedy and King assassinations, as well as the Manson murders, many craved calm introspection. Taylor, it seemed, had the musical medicine for a generation hurt by the unfulfilled promises of the previous decade.

Despite *Sweet* selling modestly to begin with, when 'Fire and Rain' was released as a single, the album took off and Taylor became an overnight sensation; his tales of inner turmoil connecting with listeners immediately.

As Taylor prepared his follow-up in 1971, all eyes were firmly fixed on him. While wrapping up recording sessions, Taylor appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* who purported him to be leader of the "bittersweet and low New Rock" movement. While the cover raised the stakes higher still, Taylor held his nerve.

Released in April 1971, *Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon* was an even bigger success than *Sweet Baby James*, charting higher on the Billboard Album charts at No. 2 (*Sweet* peaked at No. 3). The album also produced what became Taylor's only No. 1 single, 'You've Got A Friend'. Written and recorded by Carole King in 1971, this song became the biggest and most well-known hit for then 23-year-old Taylor, who first heard the song in November 1970 when his good friend King was opening for him at The Troubadour in Los Angeles.

During a recording session for *Mud Slide Slim*, Taylor had some studio time left over and his producer, Peter Asher, suggested they try 'You've Got A Friend'. While it sounded great, Taylor didn't want to steal King's song, so he called her up and she graciously granted permission. This worked out well for King too, though, since it became a lynchpin of her *Tapestry* album, which sold over 10 million copies in the US.

Mud Slide Slim reflects Taylor's struggles with drugs, depression and a longing for escape. Still very much in a confessional state, Taylor sings of sadness, optimism, traveling and the comfort of reunion. All delivered with Taylor's classic blend of folk, light rock, blues and a smattering of other roots influences.

Mud Slide Slim begins on a positive note with 'Love Has Brought Me Around'. The wonderful King composition 'You've Got A Friend' immediately follows. 'Riding on a Railroad' particularly emphasises Taylor's longing for escape with lines such as "Time to time I tire of the life that I've been leading, town to town and day by day." Nostalgia and longing permeates 'Hey Mister, That's Me Up On The Jukebox', where Taylor suggests ambivalence about his newfound success: "I've done been this lonesome picker a little too long, I've been spreading myself thin these days don't you know".

Taylor's band features Carole King on piano, Joni Mitchell on backing vocals, Danny "Kootch" Kortchmar on guitar and percussion, and Leland Sklar on bass, with Taylor's comforting tenor voice and gentle acoustic guitar picking bringing it all together.

The commercial and critical achievement of *Mud Slide Slim* ensured that Taylor was not going to go down as a one-hit wonder. Every album that he released from 1977 to 2007 sold over one million copies. Taylor enjoyed a resurgence in chart performance during the late 1990s and 2000s, when he recorded some of his most-awarded work. In 2000, Taylor was inducted into both the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

For more than 40 years Taylor has been a compass for his fans, articulating moments of pain and joy, and letting his listeners know that they are not alone. ■

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6 String Acoustics

15214 - Breedlove Discovery Concert
13544 - Eko Olveiro Pigini Ltd Edition Acoustic
13552 - Eko Vintage Ranger 6in Black, Reissue
13850 - Eko TRI 018 Honey Burst
15233 - Faith FKN Naked Neptune Acoustic Guitar
14718 - Faith FMSB45 BNC Classic Burst Mercury
16482 - Fender CC60S 3 Tone Sunburst
16871 - Fender CC60SCE LH Lefthanded, Natural
16870 - Fender CC60SCE, Black
16878 - Fender CD60S Acoustic Guitar
16483 - Fender CP60S Parlour Acoustic, Sunburst
16855 - Fender CT60S Acoustic Guitar Black
16860 - Fender CT60S Acoustic Guitar Natural
16476 - Fender FA115 Acoustic Guitar Pack
16877 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar
16873 - Fender PM2E DeLuxe Parlour Guitar, Nat
16727 - Fender PMTE Travel Guitar, All Mahogany
13386 - Landola D65 Dreadnought Acoustic, Used
16830 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid
16827 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid
16828 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid
16829 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid
15927 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Nat, Used
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
16874 - Martin M38 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchesta, Natural
6009 - Martin 00018 Grand Auditorium Acoustic Guitar
15258 - Rainsong NP12 Nylon Parlour Guitar, Used
11149 - Seagull Excursion Natural Folk SG
16585 - Stonebridge G23CR, Cutaway
0000 - Tanglewood - 9 Models in Stock Now
13910 - The Cort AF510OP Acoustic Folk Guitar
8007 - Vintage V2000MGG Giltrap Mahog Acoustic
10929 - Vintage VE2000DLX Gordon Giltrap
12437 - Yairi FY84OM Folk Acoustic Guitar
16570 - Yairi GW1100 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
14426 - Yamaha F310 Dreadnought Tobacco Sunburst
16689 - Yamaha FG820 Acoustic Guitar, Black
16722 - Yamaha JR1 Acoustic Guitar, Natural
15577 - Yamaha LL26 Handcrafted Jumbo Acoustic
15576 - Yamaha LS26 A.R.E. II Handcrafted Guitar

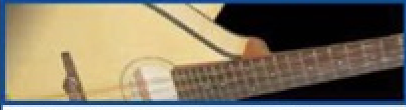
6 String Electro Acoustics

10918 - Breedlove USA Gold D/SRE
13866 - Breedlove Discovery Concert CE, Sunburst
15224 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert Acoustic
16244 - Breedlove Pursuit Dreadnought Ebony
15887 - Breedlove Stage Dreadnought, Natural
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
15993 - Crafter DE6N Electro Acoustic Guitar
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
16599 - Faith FKSE Naked Saturn Electro Acoustic
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway
16488 - Fender CC140SCE ElectroAcoustic, Natural
14730 - Fender CD100CE Left-Handed Cutaway
16487 - Fender CD140SCE, Cutaway Electro, Nat
16478 - Fender CD60S LH Left-Handed Acoustic
16486 - Fender CD60SCE Black
16858 - Fender CD60SCE Mahogany
16485 - Fender CD60SCE Natural
16861 - Fender CP140SE, Natural
16862 - Fender CP140SE Electro-Acoustic Sunburst
16889 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought
16872 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought
16514 - Fender PM3 Ltd Adirondack Triple-0 Mahog
16875 - Fender Sonoran SCE Dreadnought, Black
16876 - Fender Sonoran SCE Dreadnought SurfGreen
15525 - Fender Sonoran SCE, Candy Apple Red
6929 - Fender Stratacoustic Electro Acoustic Bk
16852 - Fender Tim Armstrong Hellcat Checker
16564 - Gibson Chet Atkins Solid Body Nylon Used
9700 - Gibson J45 Custom Electro Acoustic
15987 - Gretsch G5022CE Rancher Savannah Sunset
15985 - Gretsch G5031FT Rancher Dread., Sunburst
16750 - Ibanez AEL108TD NT 8-String, Natural
15600 - Jimmy Moon 0003 Acoustic, Secondhand
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand
14129 - Luna Heartsong Series Parlor Electro

6 String Electro Acoustics

14814 - Maestro Singa M-CSB-C All Solid Med.Jumbo
15759 - Maestro Vera MR-CSB-AAll Solid
13718 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
15747 - Maestro Victoria WE 000 with LR Baggs
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
15474 - Martin & Co DXAE Electro Acoustic
15592 - Martin 0015E Retro Non-Cutaway Electro
16760 - Martin D28 (2017) Re-Imagined Version
15487 - Martin DCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Shaded
8010 - Martin DRS1 All Mahogany Dreadnought
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 Signature Edition
13856 - Martin Ed Sheeran X Signature, Used
15591 - Martin GPC18E Electro Acoustic Guitar
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
16116 - Martin GPCX1AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
16545 - Martin OM28 Standard Series
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series D-nought
16787 - Ovation Celebrity CC57, Secondhand
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
14915 - PJ Eggle Parlour Electro Acoustic
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
8234 - Sator YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Sator YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
16427 - Takamine EF261S-AN, Gloss Antique Stain
16426 - Takamine EF341SC, Made in Japan
15376 - Takamine EF360GF Glen Frey Model
16074 - Takamine EG350SC LH Electro Acoustic
14685 - Takamine GD93CE Cutaway Electro Acoustic
16424 - Takamine GN10CE-NS, Natural
14622 - Takamine GN93CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
14264 - Takamine GX11ME NS
14249 - Takamine P1DC Electro Acoustic Guitar
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15492 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE BW
14952 - Tanglewood TSFCE Black
14951 - Tanglewood TSFCE White
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
15787 - Tanglewood TVC XMP Electro Acoustic
15786 - Tanglewood TW28CE XOV
15583 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BK
15584 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BR
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
12669 - Tanglewood TW45 EG E Super Folk Cutaway
15496 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Black
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgandy
15495 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Whiskey Gloss
15982 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf Pro X45-AVE
15978 - Tanglewood X70 Electro Acoustic Guitar
16583 - Taylor 414CEN Nylon String Electro, Used
15850 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
0000 - Yamaha - 12 Models in Stock Now

Mandolin Family



8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
15435 - Blue Moon Irish Bouzouki, Pear Shape
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
15598 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon Bouzouki, Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
16868 - Tanglewood TWMF VS E
16869 - Tanglewood TWMOS VSG Mandolin
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

12 Strings

16506 - Fender CD-140SCE 12-String, Natural
16713 - Lakewood M32 Custom 12-String, Used

Classical Guitars

8590 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electo Acoustic
15547 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
16564 - Gibson Chet Atkins Solid Body Used
7366 - Jose Ferrer 1/2 Classical Guitar
12622 - Jose Ferrer 4/4 Full-Size Classical
15585 - Manuel Rodriguez C3 , Secondhand
16036 - Mendieta Artizan W Classical Guitar
16034 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
16033 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
6776 - Mendieta Conservatoire B Classical
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
16045 - Mendieta Conservatoire D Classical
6775 - Mendieta Conservatoire ECE Elec Classic
16058 - Mendieta Estudiante Classica Classical
16057 - Mendieta Estudiante Classic 3/4 Pequeno
16037 - Mendieta Estudiante Flamenco Guitar
6779 - Mendieta Estudio P Classical Guitar
16051 - Mendieta Estudio P Pequeno 3/4 Size
6778 - Mendieta Estudio R Classical Guitar
6774 - Mendieta J Flamenco Guitar
16038 - Mendieta Professional Classica
8586 - Mendieta Professional Flamenco Guitar
15769 - Ortega Coral NY Nylon String Guitar
15719 - Ortega HoneySuite CE Nylon String Guitar
6913 - Raimundo 630E Electro Classical Guitar
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Aniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
16326 - Stagg C405 Linden 1/4 Classical Guitar
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
8353 - Stagg C530 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
16583 - Taylor 414CEN Nylon String Electro, Used
8350 - Westcoast Classical Guitar
8360 - Westcoast Slim Body Electro Classical
8352 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Natural
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
16269 - Yamaha CG170SA, Secondhand
14698 - Yamaha CS40 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nat
15620 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar TBS
15969 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon

Acoustic Amplification

5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
9494 - AER Compact 60 Mk II
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
16480 - Fender Acoustic 100 Acoustic Amp Combo
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
15775 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4", Ex-Demo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
16903 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
16030 - Tanglewood TBA5 5W Acoustic Amp, Used
16469 - Vox VX50AG Acoustic Amp
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
16714 - Baton Rouge UR11C Concert Ukulele
16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
14648 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor Ukulele
16226 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor LEFTY
10386 - Fender Mino'Aka Koa CE Concert Uke
13616 - Fender Rhalea Soprano Ukulele
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
15833 - Korala UKS32 Soprano Ukulele
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
15570 - Luna Malu Peace Soprano Ukulele
16835 - AAMaestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert
16839 - Maestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert Electro-Acoustic
16836 - Maestro UC-MR-SB-G Electro-Acoustic
16840 - Maestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert Electro-Acoustic
16837 - Maestro UT-IR-SB-C Ukulele
16838 - Maestro UT-K-CSB Tenor Electro-Acoustic
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
15691 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Black
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13681 - Nukulele "Helles Bier" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
16104 - Ohana CK35G-5 5-String Concert Ukulele
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
15956 - Ohana SK16 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20 Soprano Ukulele Uke
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
15959 - Ohana SK35GS Solid Mahogany Gloss
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
9529 - Ohana SK50MG Soprano Ukulele
4714 - Ohana SK50WG Soprano Ukulele
4465 - Ohana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
9049 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Uke
16063 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Ukulele
12184 - Ohana TK50MG Tenor Ukulele
16103 - Ohana TK72 Tenor Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
13312 - Ohana Tenor Uke Gig Bag
16021 - Ohana CK80 Solid Cedar Top Concert Uke
12740 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
10385 - Risa UKS386MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
10426 - Uluru III Tenor Ukulele
16454 - Uluru Koa I All Solid Koa Soprano Uke
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele

Travel & Tenor Guitars

8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak
16727 - Fender PMTE Travel Guitar, All Mahogany
16287 - JN Cigar Box Cask Hogshead Guitar
16286 - JN Cigar Box Puncheon Cask Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 Signature Edition
13856 - Martin Ed Sheeran X Signature, Used
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
14264 - Takamine GX11ME NS
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
14439 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Blk
14436 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Nat
16722 - Yamaha JR1 Acoustic Guitar, Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
7121 - Gitane Cigano GJ-0, Oval Hole, Natural
7122 - Gitane D500 Gypsy Jazz, Natural GR52066
7216 - Gitane DG255 Gypsy Jazz Guitar in Nat
9805 - Gitane DG300 Gypsy Jazz Guitar In Nat
16911 - Gitane GJ10 Cigano Gypsy Jazz,GR52029
16073 - Gitane Cigano Gypsy Jazz Guitar, D Hole
7120 - Gitane Cigano GJ5 Gypsy Jazz, Natural

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